

RICHARD MILLE



A Racing Machine On The Wrist



2 STEPHEN STREET, LONDON, WIT IAN, UK

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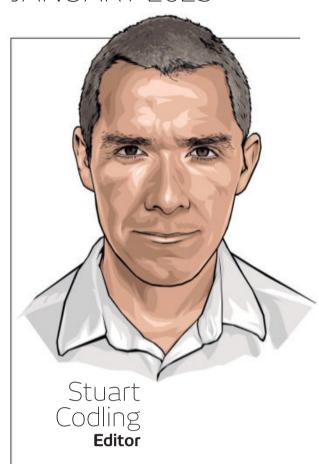
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IGNITION

JANUARY 2025



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ANDREW BENSON

The BBC's Formula 1 correspondent traces the ups and downs of Audi's convoluted entry into the sport. And it's still a year away... (p42)



OLEG KARPOV

Oleg has profiled Brazil's new hope, Gabriel Bortoleto, this month (p48), and also tracked Haas's chief race engineer in Qatar (p50)



FRANK FOSTER

Art editor Frank has been the genius behind the look of *F1/GP Racing* since 2005. He makes words come alive and is an absolute legend



RONALD VORDING

Motorsport.com's Dutch F1 journalist sat in on world champion Max Verstappen's mothertongue title-winning Las Vegas chat (p30)



Do you believe?

The world was very different last time McLaren won the constructors championship (1 November 1998, to be exact). Cher was beginning her second week in the UK number one spot with Believe, while *The Truman Show* topped the UK box office after a blockbuster summer in which a giant meteorite came off second best to Bruce Willis. The then Prince Charles was getting ready to celebrate his 50th birthday. Following Frank Sinatra's death in May, there was still an unfilled vacancy for crooners with a penchant for singing slightly off key, though Robbie Williams was understood to be polishing his CV.

Neither Lando Norris nor Oscar Piastri were so much as twinkles in their parents' eyes. Max Verstappen, whose birth had been noted a year earlier in the pages of what was then known as *F1 Racing*, was still in nappies – and yet to be abandoned on a roadside by his father in a fit of pique after losing a kart race. Indubitably a more innocent age.

Both the drivers and constructors' titles were decided on that day at Suzuka – this may come as a jolt of surprise to those who remember 1998 as a year of McLaren dominance, but such are the tricks that memory plays. The championship battle went down to the wire in what was the last of 16 rounds; 26 years later we contemplate the grand finale after a record-breaking and stamina-testing 24 races.

As we explore in this month's cover feature, while the figure of 25 races is inked into the

Concorde Agreement as the maximum, in practice 24 is a hard limit. As global interest in Formula 1 continues to surge, yet more territories want to join – and the commercial rights holder has no desire to pull up the ladders. Instead, some cherished (and not-so-cherished) venues will be struck off or assume the status of 'irregular regulars'.

Given the need to retain momentum, particularly for those events which don't enjoy generous national government subsidies, it's easy to understand why Zandvoort has decided to exit entirely rather than go into a rotation cycle with Spa-Francorchamps. The Dutch Grand Prix isn't massively profitable and relies on Max Verstappen for ticket sales, which is why the promoter pushed for a one-year extension with a defined exit in 2026... rather than a long-term rotation contract stretching into a future hinterland in which Max may not be around.

On the subject of planning for the future, change is afoot around here as you will see on the opposite page. It's been my privilege to spend, on and off, 23 of this magazine's 29 years as part of the fantastic team which produces it. My thanks to them — and to you, the readers, without whom we wouldn't be here. Do join us for what comes next...

GP Racing has a podcast!

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Dear GP Racing reader,

Ever since the world championship began in 1950, Formula 1 has been a constantly evolving spectacle. All the competitors know that if they're not changing and improving from race to race, they'll be overtaken.

With that imperative in mind, we've been working behind the scenes on a new and exciting development which will roll out of the garage shortly. From January we will be merging with our weekly sister title into a single monthly publication under the Autosport brand, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2025.

What that means for you is a bigger, better magazine with expanded coverage of F1, national and international racing while retaining many of your favourite regulars and contributors. At GP Racing we live by the watchwords of rigour, access, creativity and exclusivity. That will continue as we embark on this exciting new era.

The media landscape has transformed in the 29 years since GP Racing launched as F1 Racing. Beyond the pages of the new magazine you'll be able to enjoy more online, podcast and video content – none of which was imaginable when we launched in April 1996, a bygone age of paying by the minute for slow dial-up connections.

Thanks to you, the reader, for joining us on this journey. We hope you'll enjoy the future as much as we will.

Stuart Codling



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Spinning that wheel for me

Second time out, the Las Vegas Grand Prix was less of a bunfight than before in terms of accessing various parts of the circuit.

Getting to where you needed to go and being certain of getting through various gates once you got there felt like a bit of a lottery (or even a spin of the roulette wheel) last year.

For first practice I went up into the Paddock Club to shoot downwards at Turn 1. This is that part of the circuit which runs across the block of land F1 actually bought to construct the pit complex. I'm a big fan of circuits with identity and I like the neat touch of having the suits from playing cards marked on the kerbs.



PhotographerZak Mauger

Where Las Vegas, USA When 7.16pm, Thursday 21 November 2024

Details Canon EOS R3 70-200mm lens, 1/640th @ F4







The Las Vegas Strip tease

I'll come out and say it: I'm not a massive fan of the Las Vegas circuit. It looks great if you're shooting on high-definition TV cameras from a helicopter but at ground level there's lots of concrete, ugly fences, and harsh day-for-night lighting.

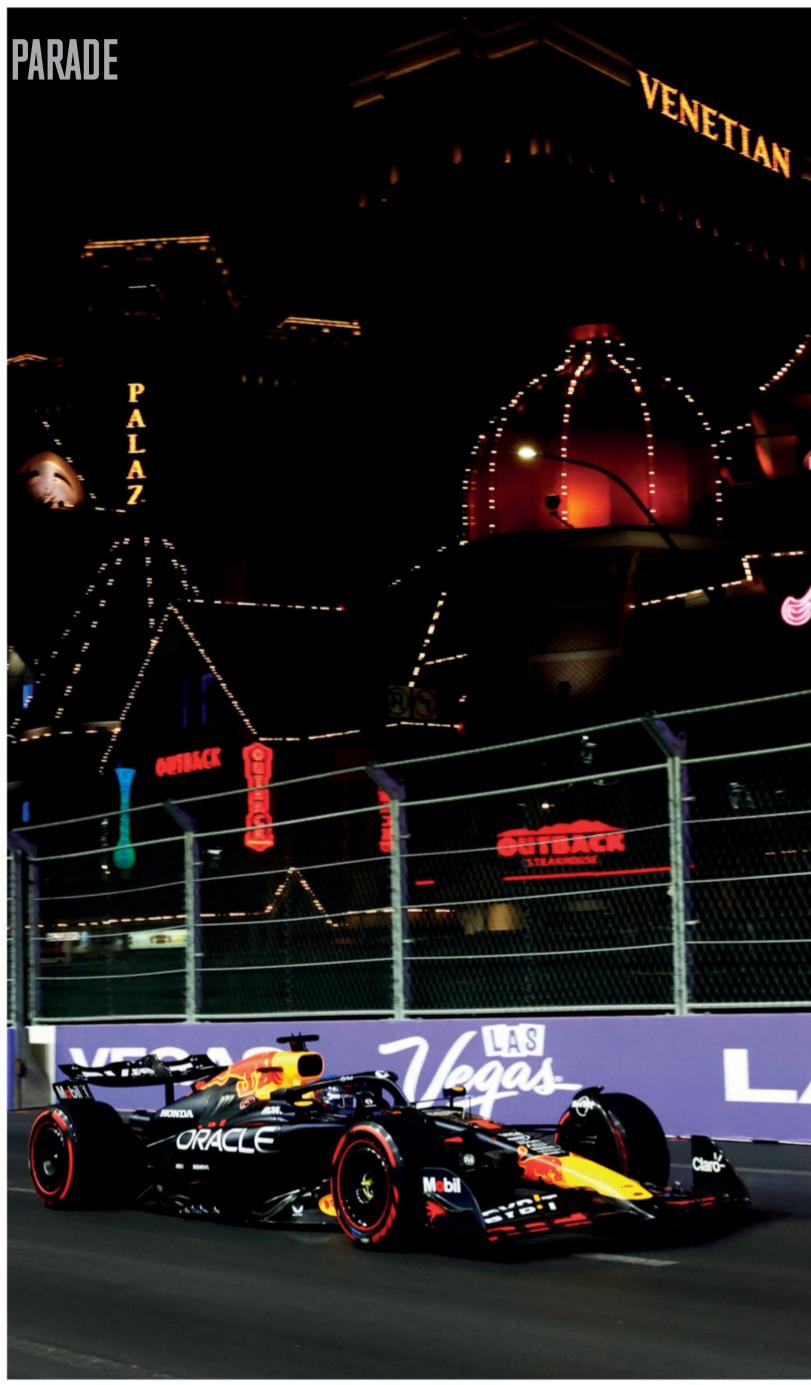
Given the scarcity of 'windows' in the fencing, you have to work around this challenge by using the magic of optics, picking a lens of sufficient length to shoot 'through' the fence. I got this shot on the strip, standing in the entrance to - of all things -Siegfried & Roy Drive. You get a little flavour of Vegas in the background with the lights of the Outback. Does this, then, qualify as a 'steak' out?



Photographer Sam Bloxham

Where Las Vegas, USA When 6.32pm, Thursday 21 November 2024

Details Canon EOS R3 24-70mm lens, 1/1300th @ F5.6





We used to be friends

It's difficult to look at this shot now without thinking of that Dandy Warhols song:-

A long time ago we used to be friends

But I haven't thought of you lately at all

Straight after qualifying in Las Vegas, George Russell was on pole and Max Verstappen congratulated him warmly in the pitlane. It had been a difficult session for Max, who qualified fifth, but you wouldn't think so to look at him. That peerless Brazil win had taken a lot of the pressure off and he only had to finish ahead of Lando Norris behind him on the grid – to seal the title. Maybe the long trip to Qatar just made them tetchy...



Photographer Sam Bloxham

Where Las Vegas, USA When 11.26pm, Friday 22 November 2024

Details Canon EOS R3 24-70mm lens, 1/500th @ F3.2



Not a qualified success

At this point in the Vegas weekend you might not have put money on Max getting the championship over the line on race day. You could see how hard he was having to work the car to get a lap time out of it. By this point his embattled teammate Sergio Pérez had probably finished trying to explain his Q1 exit to sceptical journalists in the 'pen' and was running through his excuses with an even more sceptical Christian Horner.

Q3 got underway after a pause while the remnants of Franco Colapinto's Williams were swept up. Max was straight down to business and you can see his sheer commitment here, even if it wasn't reflected in a great grid position.



Photographer Simon Galloway

Where Las Vegas, USA When 11.20pm, Friday 22 November 2024

Details Nikon Z9 70-200mm lens, 1/1600th @ F3.2







May the fourth be with you

At this track, perhaps more than many others, there's an element of chance when it comes to where you need to stand to capture the post-race celebrations. Certainly after this one where the big winner of the 'day' didn't finish in the top three, so he couldn't park in the spots usually reserved for the podium-bound drivers.

Cue a mad scramble to just get to Max Verstappen's vicinity and rattle off a shot of his reaction. Well this captures that moment although I would be the last to describe it as a technically brilliant image. In an ideal world you wouldn't want those people in the background – although, unlike Darren Heath over there, Max hasn't got his back to me...



Photographer Sam Bagnall

Where Las Vegas, USA When 11.31pm, Saturday 213 November 2024

Details Nikon Z9 400mm lens, 1/800th @ F4.5





Celebrating the M4X factor

I'm not being controversial or contrarian when I say Red Bull is a team built around one driver, and that person is Max Verstappen. So as you can imagine, after a particularly challenging season, the celebrations went long into the night in the Red Bull camp.

As is customary the team laid on a photo opportunity but, what with all the post-race press Max had to do, along with a limousine commute between the pits and the Bellagio for TV interviews, it was nearly 2.30am before this exercise in cat-herding was complete.

With these sort of shots you're lucky if the majority of the people are looking at your lens; obviously Max was the important one. By this point spirits were pretty high, shall we say...

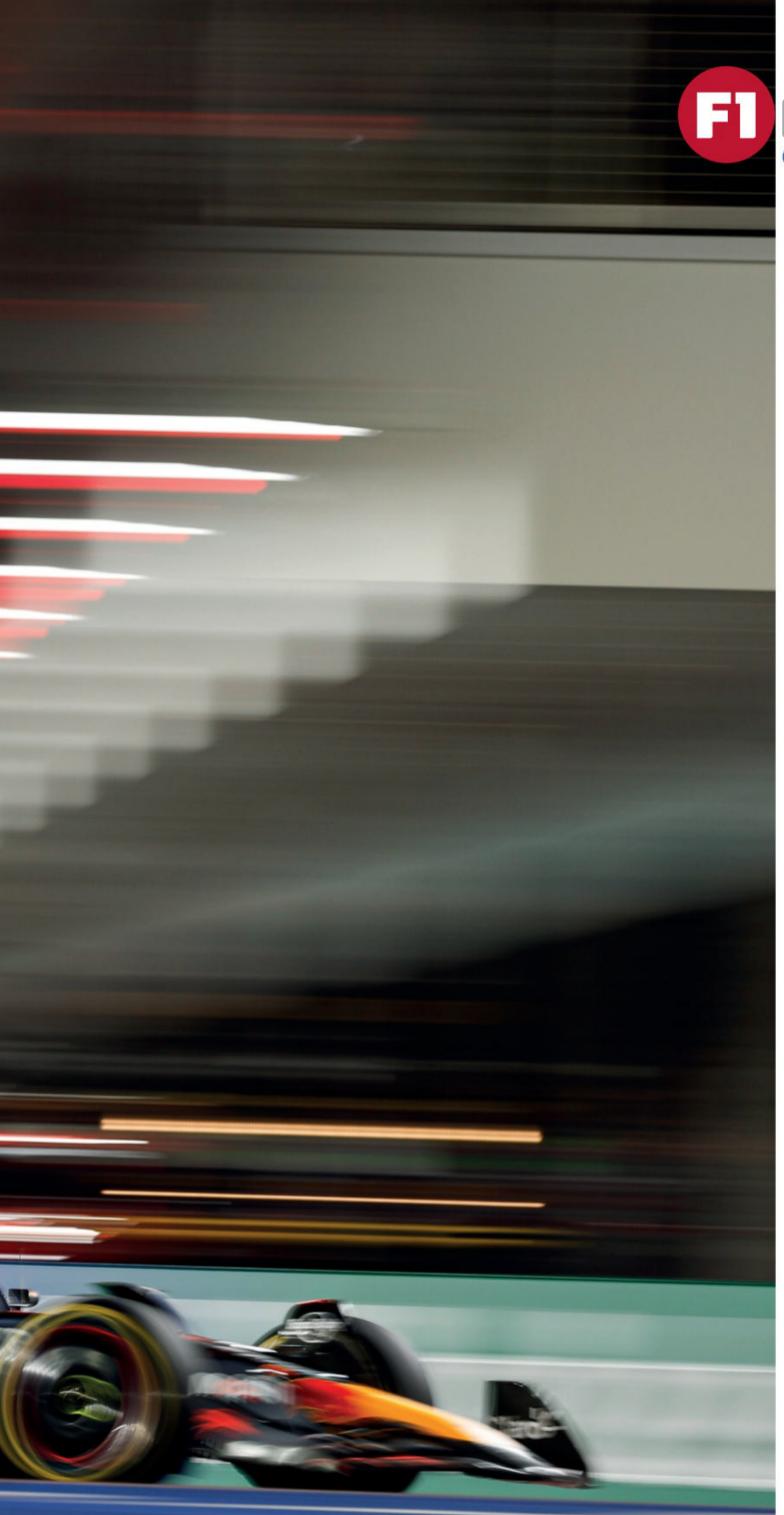


Sam Bagnall

Where Las Vegas, USA When 2.25am, Sunday 24 November 2024

Details Nikon Z9 70-200mm lens, 1/800th @ F3.5





CHAMPION PARADE

An exercise in panning for gold

One approach to getting rid of all the concrete blocks, fences and background clutter at this track is to do a panning shot on a slow shutter speed. Not only does this convey a dynamic sense of speed, the background becomes a smear of light and colour.

The trick is to get the car sharp within the frame while everything else, including the wheels, are a blur. This is where all that floodlighting comes in useful and, as a bonus, the colour cast of the artificial light sets up a kind of *Blade Runner* ambience, augmented by the red and white lights in the background which guide the eye to the car. Positioning the car slightly off-centre in the frame is another trick to convey a sense of speed.



PhotographerGlenn Dunbar

Where Las Vegas, USA When 6.50pm, Friday 22 November 2024

Details Canon EOS R3 100-500mm lens, 1/15th @ F6.3



PAPA'S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG Michael Andretti out, Mario in for GM F1 entry

LIVING IN AMERICA: GM GETS GREEN LIGHT FOR F1

01

It sounds incredible, but it's reality. One of the most explosive disputes between the FIA and FOM in recent years has ended in a peaceful resolution – and a new team on the Formula 1 grid.

After the torturous and unsuccessful attempts of Caterham, Manor and HRT to join the party, and the labours of Haas – an outlier entity whose existence is almost entirely dependent on another team – the barriers to entry seemed too high. So the arrival of a General Motors factory team, via its Cadillac brand, is vastly significant, especially since it will be based in one of Formula 1's key growth markets.

But Formula 1 would have betrayed its own nature if it had not taken the bumpiest road to this success. From the moment Mario Andretti announced his son's intention to enter F1 with his own team in March 2022, Liberty Media tried relentlessly to block the idea. Its position was clear: grid expansion was not a priority, any potential new entrant had to bring "value" to the championship, and the well-being of existing teams was not to be compromised.

Unanimous support of FOM's stance from the existing teams was easily explained by financial interests. After all, Andretti wasn't just expressing a desire to compete with them, he was effectively claiming a slice of F1's prize-money cake.

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THIS SUCCESS

Support for Andretti from the FIA – with a feisty new president eager to assert the organisation's right to be considered the true owner of F1 – added to the sense of civil war. Without F1's sign-off, Mohammed Ben Sulayem announced a tender process for new teams in January 2023 and granted a slot to Andretti. Not only did

Michael have the backing of GM and the governing body, he had started building a factory, hired staff and even boasted that the team had begun windtunnel testing.

By the time Liberty Media declared in January 2024 that Andretti's team would not be allowed on the grid, more than 100 people were already involved in the project, including former Renault technical director Nick Chester. It was clear that Michael's presumptuousness had seriously annoyed F1's leadership. The memorable quote – "the Andretti name carries

Mario Andretti, with Fernando Alonso at the 2024 Miami GP. Mario's appointment to the TWG Global board came as son Michael was sidelined

After a lot of to-ing and fro-ing the GM/ Cadillac bid has finally been accepted to join the F1 grid for 2026



This is precisely why many believe Michael Andretti's role was pivotal in Liberty Media's decision to do a 180-degree turn eight months later. In October, Andretti announced he was stepping down from an active role in the organisation, handing over the reins to Dan Towriss. It was Towriss's TWG Global





that was named as GM's partner in F1's official announcement. Notably, the Andretti name was absent from the release — despite the fact that TWG Global effectively controls Andretti Global, and Michael's father Mario eventually joined the management panel. The appointment of Andretti Sr as a director on the board was announced separately, perhaps to avoid "spoiling" the historic press release by mentioning a controversial surname.

However, according to insiders, it would be a mistake to underestimate Towriss's role in reformatting the project. Ultimately, it was GM's commitment to enter F1 as a full-fledged works team that played the decisive role — and many believe Towriss convinced the manufacturer's leadership to change its stance, since GM's initial position was that it wouldn't enter F1 without Andretti. As for Michael, if his father is to be believed, he holds no grudges despite being sidelined.

The role of team principal has now been handed to Graeme Lowdon. The man who knows from his experience as one of the leaders of the former Manor team how difficult it is to launch a new project now gets the chance to do it all over again, albeit with proper support this time. However, it's already known GM won't be able to develop a works engine until 2028, but it was confirmed as *GP Racing* went to press that Ferrari will be supplying the team with engines until then.

There's also a clear favourite among the drivers who could be in contention for a seat. Colton Herta's name has been mentioned as the frontrunner since the early days of the project and nothing has changed in that regard.

"The team always looked at the prospect of Colton Herta to be one of the drivers," Mario Andretti told *Motorsport.com*. Colton Herta, who tested a McLaren back in 2021, is believed to be high on the list of potential GM drivers

Former Manor GP and Marussia CEO Graeme Lowdon will be the GM/Cadillac team principal in 2026





"He raced alongside the likes of, just to say one, Lando Norris, who is obviously very prominent now with McLaren. And so, he is from that era, if you will, still young and vibrant and ready to go."

There are plenty of candidates on the market for GM to select an experienced driver to pair with Herta — should he amass enough points to earn a super licence — and that should benefit the new project. The wave of rookies entering F1 has left drivers such as Valtteri Bottas, Kevin Magnussen and a few others without seats. Bottas is tipped to be one of the favourites for a seat in the new team, but much could change over the next 12 months.

Either way, GM's imminent debut in the championship is a milestone for all involved. There's no doubt F1 ought to benefit from having a GM factory team on the grid. But that will only be the case if that team is competitive.



TALKIN' LOUD AND SAYIN' NOTHING?

The Grand Prix Drivers Association, an organisation with an unclear role in the world of F1 and not necessarily taken seriously by other parties involved, took a decisive step at the beginning of November. It created an Instagram account.

This unprecedented move appeared to be designed to express the GPDA's displeasure with the FIA.

The outrage was triggered by the FIA's recent campaign against swearing, alongside which its president claimed that potty-mouthed F1 drivers were starting to sound a lot like "rappers". Not only did this lead to debate about the potentially racist nature of the comment, it also reignited the discussion about whether the FIA, and in particular its president Mohammed Ben Sulayem, is expending too much energy on issues which don't merit priority status.

This came after Max Verstappen was given a communityservice penalty for using the F-word at an FIA press conference, a sanction which seemed as pettifogging as last year's jewellery ban and fireproof underwear brouhaha.

"Our members are professional drivers, racing in F1, the pinnacle of international motorsport. They are the gladiators, and every racing weekend they put on a great show for the fans," the drivers expressed in a statement posted on the freshly minted Instagram account. "We urge the FIA president to also consider his own tone and language when talking to our member drivers, or indeed about them, whether in a public forum or otherwise. Further, our members are adults; they do not need to be given instructions via the media about matters as trivial as the wearing of jewelry [sic] and underpants."

Such a strong reaction from the drivers, showing how united they were in their efforts to make it clear that their opinions should be respected, was generally well received in



Max Verstappen's community service penalty for swearing is just one of the things that has annoyed F1 drivers in 2024



GPDA director Russell with Ben Sulayem at the 2023 Abu Dhabi GP. Since then relations between the drivers and the FIA president have worsened

the paddock. At the same time, however, it appeared to have little effect on the intended recipient. Two weeks later the FIA sacked F1 race director Niels Wittich, without explanation, just days before the start of the final triple-header.

This prompted GPDA director George Russell to say that the drivers were "fed up" with what was happening at the FIA.

"Getting things to change or promises upheld seems slightly more challenging," he said. "Maybe the FIA or the president did not recognise how seriously we all felt.

"Over the course of 20 races this year and even last year, we spoke about a number of topics, and all the drivers feel pretty similar. We know what we want from the sport and the direction it has been heading, and we feel we want a small U-turn on a number of topics and we want to work together with the FIA on this. We felt that has not been happening at all from the president."

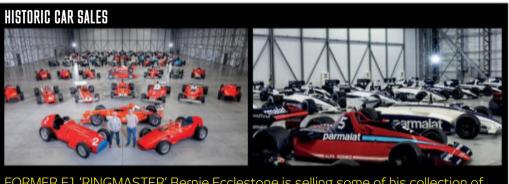
In an interview during the Qatar GP weekend the FIA president responded.

"None of their business. Sorry," he said to *Motorsport.com* about the drivers' complaints. "I respect the drivers. Let them go and concentrate on what they do best, which is race."

The only result from this discussion was that around 385,000 people followed the GPDA's Instagram profile. By the time this issue of *GP Racing* went to press, the only new post was a group photo from the final race of the championship in Abu Dhabi.

Dialogue between the drivers and the FIA seems to have stalled, with both parties agreeing to disagree. Unless a more convivial discussion is going on in the DMs?

NEWS IN BRIEF... NEWS IN BRIEF... NEWS IN BRIEF...



FORMER F1 'RINGMASTER' Bernie Ecclestone is selling some of his collection of F1 cars. Many of the 69 cars are Brabhams, the team Ecclestone owned from 1971-1988, including the BT46 'fan car'. The collection includes the Vanwall VW10, the 1951 Italian GP-winning Ferrari 375, and an ex-Michael Schumacher F2002. Ecclestone is disposing of the cars via UK-based specialist Tom Hartley Jr.

LIBERTY MEDIA

Formula 1's previous
CEO Chase Carey has
returned to Liberty
Media to serve on
the executive
committee of its
board. Carey, who
stepped down as
CEO ahead of the
2021 season, has
a brief to support
the current CEO
Stefano Domenicali.

BROTHERS

Arthur Leclerc,
Ferrari development
driver and brother
of Charles, joined
his older sibling on
track in FP1 in Abu
Dhabi. Arthur used
Carlos Sainz's car and
they were the first
brothers to share the
track in an F1 session
since Michael and Ralf
Schumacher in 2006.

K-MAG

Outgoing Haas pilot
Kevin Magnussen has
been confirmed as
a BMW driver for its
sportscar programme
in 2025. K-Mag will
race a factory BMW
M Hybrid V8 LMDh,
but it has yet to be
decided whether this
will be in the World
Endurance or IMSA
championship.

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WISHING YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR!



AUDI: CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?



It was early last spring when the news broke that Audi would buy 100% of the Sauber F1 organisation, a change of direction from the previous plan in which Tetrapak magnate Finn Rausing would retain a 25% stake. And it was late autumn when the announcement came that Audi was already selling shares in its future team.

News that the Qatar Investment Authority has acquired a "substantial minority share" in Sauber was met with mixed reactions in the paddock. On the one hand it sends out a negative signal, since it represents yet another course correction for the beleaguered project, which has already undergone changes in leadership before Audi's team has even officially started its first F1 season. On the other hand it's a sensible and, in some ways, obvious move, given that Audi's parent company, the VW Group, has been facing difficulties including a significant drop in profits – and is now expected to make a number of cuts at its factories in Germany.

However, the official line from the German manufacturer is that these two factors – the fall in profits and the sale of shares in the F1 team – are unrelated.

During a press conference at the Qatar GP, Audi CEO Gernot Döllner explained that plans to partner with a major investor were set in motion more than a year ago and had nothing to do with the company's recent financial challenges.

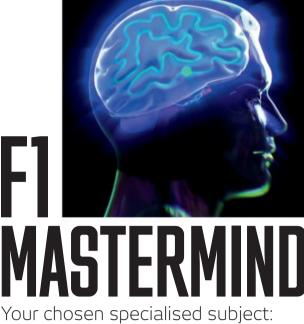
"Not at all," he said when asked if there was a link between the deal and the VW Group's challenges at home and abroad. "When I stepped in as CEO of Audi, we conducted a review of the project and the question was

DÖLLNER EXPLAINED THAT PLANS TO PARTNER WITH A MAJOR INVESTOR WERE SET IN MOTION MORE THAN A YEAR AGO

how to proceed. And that was over a year ago."

The deal with QIA - reportedly \$350 million for a 30% stake - will significantly improve the team's financial health, while Audi will retain control of the F1 operation itself.

Audi CEO Gernot Döllner and Mohammed Al-Sowaidi, CEO of the QIA, signed the shares deal ahead of the Qatar GP



the world's greatest motorsport

Q1 Fernando Alonso made his F1 debut at the 2001 Australian GP with Minardi, but who won the race?

Q2 In its nine seasons in F1, how many times has Haas finished bottom of the constructors' table?

03 Who have been Lewis Hamilton's team-mates in his 356 races with McLaren and Mercedes?

Q4 True or false: In Abu Dhabi Jack Doohan became the youngest Australian ever to race in F1?

Q5 Michael and Mick Schumacher started 349 GPs between them. Which father and son come next on the list of total GP starts?

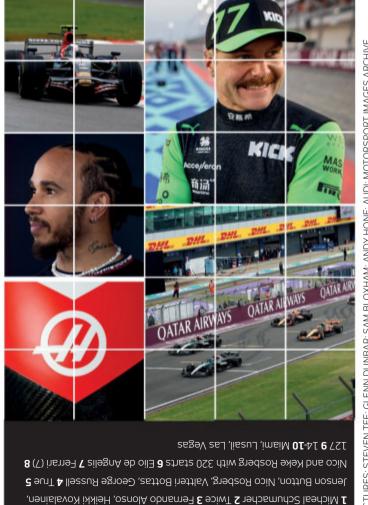
Q6 Who am I? I started 108 GPs from 1979 to 1986 for Shadow, Lotus and Brabham, claiming two wins and three pole positions.

Q7 Of the 34 Spanish GPs at the race's current Barcelona home, which team has won the most?

Q8 Including his 76 pole positions for the team, how many times did Lewis Hamilton start on the front row in GPs for Mercedes: 127, 140 or 153?

Q9 A Ferrari engine powered Sebastian Vettel to his first F1 win and how many other victories?

Q10 At which three circuits on the current calendar did Valtteri Bottas fail to claim a podium slot?





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BEN EDWARDS

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PICTURES (



There was more striking news on my side: Eurosport no longer had the rights to F1. There was change on the terrestrial side too as the BBC made way for ITV, with the late great Murray Walker swapping channels to be joined by Martin Brundle. And I would spend the next four years commentating on Champ Cars in the US for Eurosport.

By 2002 I was back covering F1 – from Biggin Hill. Formula One Management and BSkyB were early movers in what's now a familiar concept: pay-per-view coverage offering viewers many different ways of watching a live event, with a choice of cameras and the option of different commentaries (or none at all). Back then, fans in the UK still had access to free live coverage on ITV, so despite the extras offered by the F1 Digital channel not enough people signed up. At the end of the season, the project was shuttered.

By the time I rejoined the F1 paddock in 2012 there had been another shift in the media world. BBC TV had me commentating on all of the races alongside David Coulthard, with 10 races live and 10 as edited highlights. For full live coverage a Sky TV subscription was required – the audience had now grown more accustomed to the concept of paid TV. With whole channels devoted to F1, the number

> of TV personnel had grown massively and this naturally had an effect on relationships with the teams, who had to limit their availability given the sheer volume of requests. Magazines such as F1 Racing were now having to fight for access with TV channels – or work with them. The paddock felt more closed and private, yet the information coming out on screen, in magazines and on-line was more than ever.

This momentum has continued under Liberty Media's control of the commercial rights. Reversing Bernie Ecclestone's closed-door policy, Liberty gave the Netflix Drive to Survive documentary series its blessing. Besides adding another camera crew to the paddock, this had the effect of rapidly growing F1's audience (especially in the USA) when the show took off.

Another pivot away from Ecclestone's thinking came with the embracing of social media, less gatekeeping of shared F1 content on the likes of YouTube, and a content-rich website. Here the commercial rights holder was beginning to compete with media such as this magazine, hence Motorsport Network's decision to give up the licence and change the name from *F1 Racing* to *GP Racing* in 2020.

Going forward now with some new drivers and the fascinating partnership between Hamilton and Ferrari, plus the final year of an established set of technical rules, 2025 looks perfectly poised. While the media world continues to adjust, there will be new opportunities to soak up the drama.

THE EVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED

When the first issue of F1 Racing, now *GP Racing*, appeared in 1996 it was very notable to me: I was in my second year as a Formula 1 commentator for Eurosport TV and the extra depth of information and analysis was invaluable. The

arrival of a new monthly magazine was evidence of the way media coverage of F1 was evolving – and it's been changing ever since, on screen and off.

At that time our TV production system was straightforward; each programme would begin with me and John Watson speaking from the commentary box with images of the build-up to qualifying or the race. The on-camera gathering of presenters and experts that's standard nowadays was developing elsewhere, but not on Eurosport.

The media world was more compact in the mid 90s; teams would welcome us to their motorhomes for a chat, we had access to pit garages and opportunities to catch up on all sorts of info. Since John and I had no production team, we were often in the media room and discussing stories with other journalists was always a helpful step.



The first issue of F1 Racing hit the newsstands ahead of the 1996 season and, naturally, featured the reigning world champion

1996 was an emotional run on the microphone; announcing Damon Hill as world champion as he crossed the line in Suzuka to become the first title-winning son of a champion was hugely significant. His battle with Williams team-mate Jacques Villeneuve was entertaining but news that Damon was being dropped by the team for the following season – while he was still fighting for the title – was baffling. Still, it was typical of how rich an environment for intrigue F1 was becoming, and how it could support a media ecosystem.





Liberty Media has embraced social media in the paddock, something that Bernie Ecclestone was unwilling to do

When ITV took over coverage of F1 in the UK in 1997, Murray Walker switched from the BBC and he was joined in the commentary box by Martin Brundle



Damon Hill and Jacques Villeneuve on the front row of the 1996 Japanese GP. Damon would go on to win the race and claim the title, an emotional moment for many fans of F1

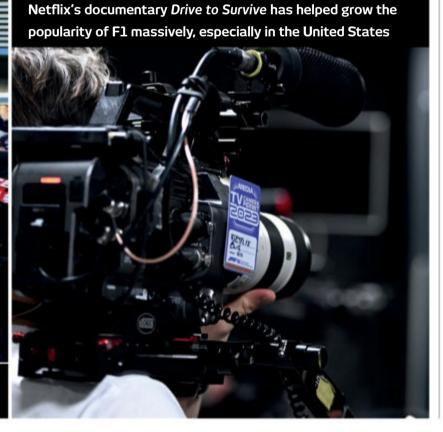


Ahead of the 2020 season the world's best-selling Formula 1 magazine underwent a name change...





The author, seen here with former Jordan and Stewart designer Gary Anderson, returned to commentate on Formula 1 in 2012, this time on the BBC







many think) which rapidly spreads out from the plug to the piston and cylinder walls. A lean mixture is not only difficult to ignite when required but also, since the ensuing combustion is slower, combustion temperatures stay hotter for longer – reducing efficiency while increasing the propensity for pre-ignition and severe thermal damage.

The reintroduction of turbocharging meant it wasn't a real problem to introduce excessive amounts of air into the engine, even at quite low engine speeds, but there remained the problem of igniting it.

The solution lay in a modification to the spark plug that was termed passive pre-chamber ignition.

This design places a small chamber, with a few small holes, over the

electrodes of the spark plug. This chamber will be around 2% of the total compression volume. When fuel injection is initiated, a small amount is pushed into the chamber leading to a locally rich mixture easily ignited

IT'S ALL ABOUT The Bonfire

The current Formula 1 engine is a model of efficiency matched only, and surprisingly, by some huge maritime diesel engines. In terms of small petrol engines, the F1 V6 is significantly ahead of anything found on the road or racetrack. How this is achieved is both innovative and relevant as the future of the internal combustion engine extends beyond some projections of its imminent demise.

There has always been a truism in F1 engine design that the secret to performance was to get as much air as possible into the engine in a given time and then adding the appropriate amount of fuel, and burning it fully and efficiently. Getting maximum air into the engine was generally achieved by good gas flow and tuning of the inlet system, increasing engine revs or turbocharging. In terms of combustion the ratio of air to fuel at which complete combustion takes place is known as the stoichiometric ratio, and for gasoline is around 14.7 times the mass of air to fuel. Maximum power was generally produced when the mixture was slightly rich, in other words the ratio was slightly lower.

The regulations introduced in 2014 turned this philosophy on its head by dictating that the fuel flow would be limited to 100kg/hour, around 60%



F1 fuel has a specific 10% ethanol content at the moment, but there are new rules for its make up for the 2026 season

of the flow of the previous 2.4-litre V8 engines. At the same time turbocharging was reintroduced and direct fuel injection allowed. This led to a complete re-think of engine design. The secret now would be to see how lean they could run an engine, in other words the opposite of previous thinking. Now the secret was to try and run a mixture that had excess air rather than fuel.

It may sound like a simple change, but the problem was that lean mixtures are difficult to ignite in a controlled fashion and burn very slowly. Ideally, when the spark plug fires, it initiates a controlled burning process (not an explosion as

by the spark. Once ignited, the mixture is ejected through the same small holes as a highly reactive jet of radicals penetrating deep into the combustion chamber, creating a high-energy distributed ignition source to the main mixture. The high energy of ignition, coupled with multiple ignition sites, compensate for the slow burn-rate normally associated with lean combustion, resulting in optimised combustion phasing and a vast improvement in peak efficiency.

Another technique used in an F1 engine is to close the inlet valve before the piston reaches the bottom of its stroke in what is called the Miller cycle. By separating the thermodynamic compression ratio from the geometric compression ratio, the expansion ratio will exceed the compression ratio,

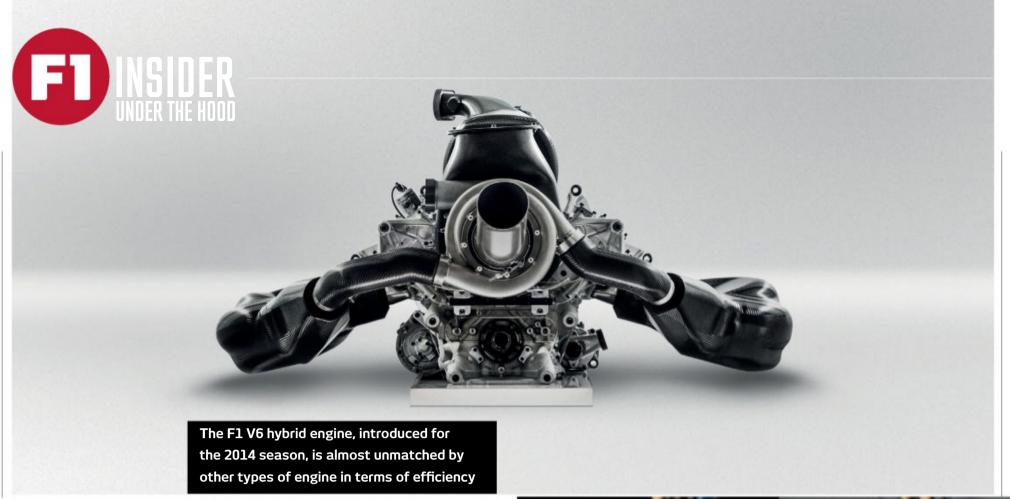


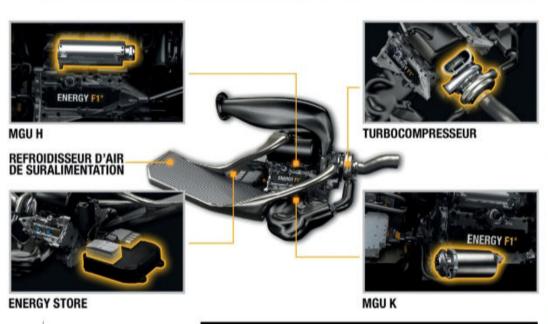
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The MGU-H, which recovers energy from the exhaust, is being removed in the engines that are being developed for the 2026 season



allowing an increase in efficiency at the cost of reduced turbulence and slower combustion. Nevertheless, it provides an overall gain.

Of course, while the combustion system is designed to extract the maximum energy from the fuel, the fuel itself has a first-order importance. Before 2022 the regulations called for 5.75% of the fuel to comprise bio-components. In general fuel

suppliers used a bio-derived iso-octane or iso-octane to comply with this regulation. Iso-octane has a high chemical energy content known as the lower heating value (LHV), a property of significant importance when fuel-mass flow is limited. Iso-octene, which has a double chemical bond, thereby containing less hydrogen, has a slightly lower LHV but better knock resistance.

In 2022 the regulations changed the nonspecific 5.75% bio-content requirement to a specific 10% ethanol content. Ethanol, since it contains oxygen, improves the anti-knock value of the fuel but in this concentration would perhaps only take the octane rating from around 104 to 104.2 – however it has

IN 2026 THERE WILL BE A CHANGE TO THE ENGINE AND FUEL. THE ENGINE MAY LOSE PEAK EFFICIENCY DUE TO THE REMOVAL OF THE MGU-H

a more significant effect on the LHV, reducing it by between 2.5% and 3%, with a direct and proportional effect on the power of the engine.

In 2026 there will be a change to the engine and fuel. The engine may lose peak efficiency due to the removal of the MGU-H, the device which recovers energy from the exhaust which would otherwise have been lost as heat. In addition, the fuel must be sustainable and will see an increase in the concentration of oxygenates from 10% to around 20% volume (by ethanol equivalency). A maximum LHV of 41megajoules/kilogram is also mandated, around 5% lower than is achieved at present, which may lead to a reduction in efficiency.

Since the regulated fuel-flow limit will change

from mass flow to energy flow in 2026, LHV itself will no longer have a direct impact on engine performance. In fact we may find that fuels with a lower LHV have improved knock resistance and burn-rate in some engine concepts. However, LHV will still form an important consideration when a fuel is optimised for a given PU/chassis package.

One thing is very certain. Just as four-valve technology, fuel injection and overhead camshafts have moved from race engines to mainstream production engines, so too will the advanced combustion features of the current F1 power unit (as well as the advanced fuels) contribute to increased efficiency for transport systems relying on the internal combustion engine.



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Essential guide to the business of F1



STRAIGHT TALK

MARK GALLAGHER

X @_markgallagher



Global would bring to F1. Instead, there was a sense of entitlement.

Another told me that possessing a famous father's name was insufficient to warrant being granted an entry. "David Brabham, Damon Hill and Jacques Villeneuve might well claim they deserve a nod," he suggested.

Two things changed the tenor of the discussions. The arrival of investor Dan Towriss into Andretti Global, and GM's interest in F1 once it saw the response to a potential Cadillac branding deal.

Towriss is CEO and president of the Indiana-based Group 1001 financial services company and, as a sponsor-turned investor, has an eye for a deal. He could see the opportunity in Andretti Global's struggles to join F1. In sidelining Michael and elevating General Motors into headlining the new entry, the prospects for an 11th new team appeared vastly more attractive to the Formula One Group.

At the time of writing it remains to be seen how both the deal and the team will be structured, but the view in Las Vegas was that the building blocks are in place. Whether the timing of GM's entry into F1 is ideal or not is a point worth considering.

> The automotive industry is facing severe headwinds. Aston Martin drastically lowered

HOW GM WON A BATTLE THAT **ANDRETTI LOST**

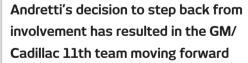
Whether in business or sport, momentum is key. Think about the way in which world champion Max Verstappen built momentum during the first half of 2024, sufficient to survive four winless months before zeroing in on his goal with a single dominant victory in São Paolo. In the end the fourth title seemed almost inevitable.

The same can be applied to Formula 1's muchdebated 11th team entry. When news leaked during the Las Vegas weekend that General Motors will join the F1 world championship in 2026, few in the know seemed surprised.

For some weeks it appeared the path was being cleared for America's largest domestic car manufacturer to enter the sport. Suddenly GM was in the driving seat of Andretti Global's previous efforts to join the fray.

It had already been noted that the two men who were most at loggerheads over Andretti Global's attempts to join F1 had been sidelined. September's announcement that Michael Andretti was stepping back from team ownership was followed by

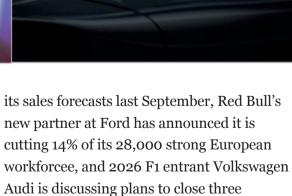




November's news that Greg Maffei, president and CEO of Liberty Media, the ultimate boss of F1, would be leaving his role at the end of the year.

It is no secret that they didn't get on.

Andretti made himself unpopular, not by the fact of applying to join F1, but by the way he went about it. One team principal told me how a meeting with the 62-year-old former CART champion served only to show that he had no idea of what he was getting himself into. There was, he said, no proposition in terms of what Andretti



In 2008, the last time the car industry caught a cold, F1 was unceremoniously dumped by the likes of Honda, BMW and Toyota. Meanwhile GM filed for bankruptcy. While the arrival into F1 of Ford, Honda, VW Audi and GM in 2026 is being heartily welcomed, we should all pause to reflect. We have been here before.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH

WORDS RONALD VORDING PORTRAIT RED BULL CONTENT POOL

VERSTAP

Speaking right after winning his fourth consecutive world championship, Max opens up - in typically punchy style - about his 2024 struggles and also takes a swing at his critics...

There was a bit of a trembling in your voice after the [Las Vegas] race, but what's your overall feeling now?

I'm just glad it's over. If you look at the season, we had a great start, but after that we struggled for a long time. I am mainly proud of the way we got through that as a team.

Before Brazil, you probably couldn't have imagined securing the title as early as Vegas.

No, I really did think we would fight to the last in Abu Dhabi. But then luckily rain came in Brazil, that worked out perfectly for me.

In the press conference when we asked about how difficult it was to stay calm with all the off-track stuff happening at the beginning of the season, you were quite open about the difficult moments this year and the mental challenges... I'd already had three beers by then!

But mentally it's been more difficult than the previous two years?

For me the mental side is not the problem, it's just how you react as a person to disappointments and how you try to deal with them as calmly as possible. We weren't happy about a lot of races, but there's no point in shouting around that it's all terrible.

How difficult has that been - and could the Max from 2021 have done it in the same way?

Less so, but that's also what you learn. When you already have a few championships in the bag, then it's a bit easier to put everything into perspective.

You also said in the press conference "for 70% of this year I haven't had the fastest car".

I do think so, yes. From Miami onwards, I hardly ever had the fastest car in any race.

There seemed to be a turning point after Monza, as with Baku last season.

Actually, we had problems from race one, but back then we had such a big lead that it was less noticeable. I also think that certain teams didn't make such a big step from the end of last year to the beginning of this season, and we did. After that our problems showed up and Monza really was the worst weekend.

You had an emotional hug with Helmut Marko after winning the championship; what does it mean after this difficult year?

We've also been through a lot together, positive things and negative things of course. You obviously talk to each other a lot during the season. When I joined Red Bull, the goal was to be competitive, but to win four world championships together... At that time [Sebastian] Vettel was the benchmark with four world championships. To do that again is of course very special.

You've now won more titles than Ayrton Senna and Niki Lauda, both triple world champions. How is that for you as an F1 fan?

I always find it very difficult to compare different eras. Drivers like that have obviously been incredible in their time as well. Senna died too early, of course, but to be at the same level as them or even above them [in the statistics] that's very special.

WHEN I JOINED RED BULL, THE GOAL WAS TO BE COMPETITIVE, BUT TO WIN FOUR WORLD **CHAMPIONSHIPS TOGETHER...**

Do you also talk about that with your partner's father [Nelson Piquet]?

Yes, that's funny. Until now we were equal with three titles. Now I have the upper hand! He doesn't care about that at all, but the first time I met him I had nothing. Now it's a different story.

Were there any moments this season when you thought "I'm not going to win it"? In Monza you said it wasn't realistic to become champion again. No, because at that time things were very difficult.

But then we changed a lot of things to the car.

Were you different behind the scenes this year? Christian Horner said you were more "involved" was that more than the previous two seasons?

Yes, because in the last two years [2022-23] it wasn't necessary. Everything ran smoothly, so I didn't need to be there for 10 extra days. It just went well – I didn't have to do anything extra.

That must have made this season tougher.

Absolutely, which is why I'm glad it's done now.

[McLaren CEO] Zak Brown had said you wouldn't be winning the title without the fastest car. After you won it you reminded him of that on live TV...

You know, things like that only motivate me. When people are critical or think I can only win in the best car, I will prove them wrong.

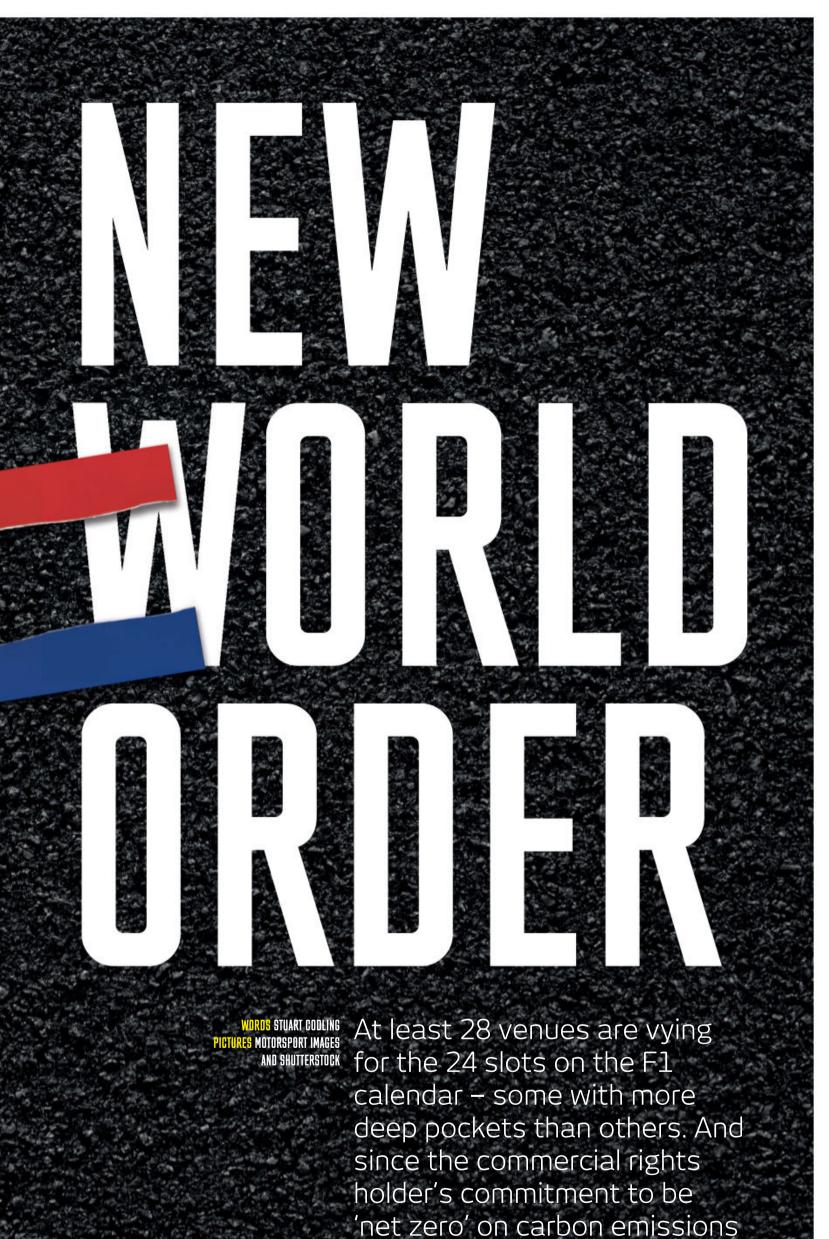
If you'd been driving the McLaren this year, would you have been champion as well?

Yes, even earlier. Ferrari? Fairly the same I think. Mercedes, I think that would have been trickier.

Is there anyone else in F1 who could have won the championship with this year's Red Bull car?

We're in the right place for that question here in Vegas, because you can bet on that! All I can say: I wish them the best of luck with that...





by 2030 dictates very

something's got to give...

different travel arrangements,

SAFE

AUSTRALIA

2025 date: 14-16 March Contract until: 2037

In 2022 Melbourne agreed a deal which took it to 2035 but then gained a two-year extension as quid pro quo for allowing Saudi Arabia to take the coveted season-opener slot in 2024. As it transpired, a calendar rejig for logistics purposes meant last season began with Bahrain after a preseason test there. Melbourne has an agreement to host the season opener at least four times in its current contract.

SAFE



2025 date: 21-23 March Contract until: 2030

Although there have been some doubts over the quality of the track surface and the impact on domestic interest of Zhou Guanyu losing his race drive, China is such an important territory for Formula 1 that renewal of the previous contract (which was due to end in 2025) was a formality.

SAFE

JAPAN



2025 date: 4-6 April Contract until: 2029

Honda, which owns the Suzuka track, has rediscovered its interest in F1 after recent success with Red Bull, and is committed post-2026 as Aston Martin's engine partner. It reached a five-year extension deal with F1 in 2024. Until that point there had been rumours of a street race in Osaka replacing Suzuka as the Japanese GP venue.

SAFE



BAHRAIN 2025 date: 11-13 April Contract until: 2036

Having signed a 14-year extension back in 2022, Bahrain is in F1 for the long haul and its circuit will have an on-site solar farm so as to have net zero carbon emissions by 2030. The country's sovereign wealth fund is a majority owner of McLaren.

ADDOCK WAGS USED TO (HALF) JOKE THAT the Formula 1 calendar was drawn up by people who flew by private jet, or at the very least turned left while lowering themselves to breathe the same air as we mortals on a scheduled flight. But now our annual itinerary, which has long bordered on the chaotic and dysfunctional, is about to be transformed.

The calendar is going to change shape, in part to reduce expenses for and physical strains on competitors under the budget cap, but chiefly because Formula 1 needs to streamline its travel to move closer to its stated goal of achieving 'net zero' status by 2030. In parallel with this commitment – and what an unlikely and uncomfortable combination this makes – F1 also wants to accommodate new venues, mostly outside the traditional European heartland.

At the same time there is a recognition that, while the Concorde Agreement enshrines a maximum of 25 races per season, recent experience has shown 24 is the most the competitors can reasonably handle. What this means is that several races in Europe will enter 'rotation' to make room for the new venues which are waiting to shower the commercial rights holder with money.

Beyond the addition of Madrid for 2026, it's known that Rwanda and Thailand want to host grands prix, and that Argentina and Turkey covet a return to the calendar. In recent years there's also been talk of South Africa making a comeback, and F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali went as far as touring several potential street circuit locations for a so-called Caribbean Grand Prix in the Colombian city of Barranquilla. While this is unlikely to happen in the near future, Mexican GP promoter Alejandro Soberón recently confirmed he had been consulted by the Colombian authorities as part of their due diligence process. Soberón's company, CIE, is among Latin America's biggest live entertainment promoters.

Saudi Arabia is also known to want a second GP venue on its shores. When the country joined the F1 calendar in 2021 via a street circuit in Jeddah, the initial plan was for the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix to move to a new, purpose-built track as part of a wider development in Qiddiya by the end of the decade. This idea quickly evolved: speaking ahead of the 2023 event the race's promoter, Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al-Abdullah Al Faisal, said, "Saudi Arabia is a very big market and we have a very strong economy, so the idea of having two races in Saudi is doable. I would not be surprised if Saudi in the near future will host two races.

"We don't know if it would be practical and feasible for Formula One Management and the teams, but we built this track in Jeddah to last."

This is understood to now be very much on the cards. As one of the biggest contributors to F1's income, via the extant Jeddah sanctioning deal (believed to be worth \$55m per year) and state-owned oil company Aramco's sponsorship (\$450m over 10 years), Saudi Arabia has considerable influence at the top table.



Rotation coming soon

The future F1 calendar will look rather different, with races grouped together geographically rather than hopping back and forth between continents. The most recent season began this direction of travel as Japan and Azerbaijan moved to more logistically sensible slots. F1's next step has been to engineer a move for the Monaco GP which enables Canada to host its race just after Miami; the venues are near enough for this to make practical sense but not so close as to poach ticket sales from one another. The possibility of proximate races cannibalising each other's audiences has become less of a concern as F1's global audience has boomed.

To accommodate new venues, though, something has to give. In late 2023, McLaren CEO Zak Brown proposed a system whereby 28 tracks could be accommodated – but only by some of them ceasing to host events annually. He returned to that during the FIA press conference at the last US GP, in response to a question about how to avoid a repetition of the 2024 season's punishing schedule of the final six rounds coming as two triple-headers.

"As far as the calendar goes, I think 24 is the maximum," he said. "As I've said before, I think maybe having 20 fixed races and eight races that rotate every other year so we can continue to grow the sport, because there's definitely demand. So if we can be in 28 markets, I think that would be fantastic. But I think we can only do that 24 times a year.

"We are going to have to look at rotations and things of that nature, which we're already starting to do. This is the first year we've done 24 races. Give it another couple of years, there will be some people that get pretty tired."

F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali has also stated on more than one occasion that "24 is the limit". But he also claimed, while speaking to reporters during the last Chinese GP weekend, that "more than 35" potential venues for new races had been in contact, of which perhaps 11 were "realistic". He shared









the vision for how these might be incorporated during Liberty Media's most recent quarterly earnings call with investors.

"We have some news to share very, very soon with regard to the possibility in the mid-term to have some rotational European Grand Prix and some other new options coming later," he said. "This is something we will clarify in due course. It is true we have a large demand of new possible venues that want to come in. Our choice will always be balanced between the right economic benefits we can have as a system, and also to leverage the growth of the market that we can see potential that will be beneficial for us to grow even further our business."

Madrid, which hosted a Red
Bull demo run as recently as last
year (above, left), will be the
venue of the Spanish GP
from 2026 onwards with a
street circuit layout (above)

THE BUSINESS LOGIC IS CLEAR. LUCRATIVE NEW MARKETS – TYPICALLY WITH THE BACKING OF GOVERNMENTS EAGER TO PUT THEIR COUNTRIES ON THE SPORTING MAP – HAVE LONG BEEN PART OF F1'S GAMEPLAN

The syntax might have been muddled but the business logic is clear. Lucrative new markets – typically with the backing of governments eager to put their countries on the sporting map – have long been part of F1's gameplan. In the latter part of the Bernie Ecclestone era, when CVC Capital Partners was loading the business with debt which needed to be offset somehow, the likes of South Korea and India followed Malaysia, Bahrain, China and Turkey into the calendar.

This means those European grands prix which have no state funding are at the greatest risk of becoming 'irregular regulars' – rotating with each other and happening every other year, or disappearing entirely.



SAFE SAUDI ARABIA-JEDDAH 2025 date: 18-20 April Contract until: 2030 Jeddah will be on the calendar to the end of the decade and Saudi Arabia is known to covet another race on its soil. As a key investor in F1, it will likely secure it.

USA-MIAMI

2025 date: 2-4 May

Contract until: 2031

As part of F1's much-touted expansion into the important US market, this venue doesn't need to justify its presence – as evinced by the signing of a 10-year contract before the first race.

SAFE MONACO

2025 date: 23-25 May **Contract until**: 2031

As we explain on p40, Monaco is no longer as commercially important to F1 as it once was and it had to give up its traditional end-of-May date from 2026 in order to secure a relatively modest six-year extension.

SAFE CANADA

2025 date: 13-15 June Contract until: 2031

Another race to receive a decently long extension as quid pro quo for agreeing to shift dates, in this case to May – where temperatures in Montréal will likely be below 10C...

SAFE AUSTRIA

2025 date: 27-29 June **Contract until:** 2030

Owned by a Red Bull subsidiary, the Red Bull Ring announced two contract extensions in 2023: a first one in March taking the race until 2027, then four months later an updated deal taking it to 2030. This came at a time when doubts surrounded the company's long-term commitment after the death of Dietrich Mateschitz.

Which races will go?

Of the venues soon to be out of contract, it's understood that Barcelona, Spa and Imola are the prime candidates to enter rotation. While few fans – and people working in F1 – will miss Barcelona, its promoter is eager to stay in play even though the Spanish Grand Prix is moving to a new semi-street circuit in Madrid. If enough local investment can be found, there is a possibility of Barcelona hosting a non-annual event under a different name, similar to Imola's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix arrangement.

The danger for events taking this approach is that the local appetite can run out very quickly, as with the short-lived rebirth of the French Grand Prix at Paul Ricard, which fizzled out after its fourth outing.

Losing 'classic' venues is a problematic subject for purists. When Domenicali took over as F1 CEO he spoke of a need to maintain a number of "historic" races in order to maintain F1's identity and credibility. But that messaging has hardened somewhat over the past year and he has recently said "nothing is given for granted to anyone".

So as F1 enters its 75th anniversary year, at least one of the circuits which hosted a grand prix in the inaugural world championship season faces an uncertain future. Spa-Francorchamps is a prime candidate for rotation despite its status as one of grand prix racing's most challenging tracks. The race's promoter, Spa Grand Prix, is owned by the local Walloon government and therefore subject to greater public scrutiny if the figures don't add up.

Conspicuously among long-term deals granted to other races, Belgium has

survived on one-year extensions since the pandemic, and twice the prime minister, Alexander De Croo, has interceded personally with Domenicali to plead his country's case. That will no longer happen since De Croo resigned after his party was defeated at the federal polls last June.

Just across the border in Holland, Zandvoort has no government support and relies entirely on commercial revenues to sustain the Dutch Grand Prix. *GP Racing* understands that the only deal on the table for it to stay in F1 was to enter rotation. Given its reliance on Max Verstappen fans, and the imminent prodspect of VAT being levied on ticket sales, it chose to bow out altogether in 2026..

Other European venues have had to 'show willing' by making large capital investments, such as Monza's new paddock facilities and track surface and the Hungaroring's new pit complex. Even Monaco has had to give ground (see sidebar). Hungary has been granted a contract extension and Monza, whose previous deal ended in 2025, has been rewarded similarly.

China's deal was also due to end in 2025 but the Shanghai circuit has been granted a five-year extension. Although the country is an important market for the automobile industry, its commitment to F1 has wavered in recent years. Zhou Guanyu's presence on the grid contributed to healthy ticket sales for Shanghai's first post-Covid race – can these be sustained with him gone?

Even then, claims of "sell-out" crowds must be nuanced – the circuit was built at speed on reclaimed swampland and is subsiding in places, to the extent that one grandstand collapsed several years ago and the ones outside Turns 12 and 13 have never been used except as giant ad hoardings.



SO AS F1 ENTERS ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR, AT LEAST ONE OF THE CIRCUITS WHICH HOSTED A GRAND PRIX IN THE INAUGURAL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON FACES AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The new arrivals

For all Stefano Domenicali's talk of at least 11 viable new venues eager to join the calendar, it's understood that just five are close enough be announced imminently. Qiddiya Speed Park, part of a massive development under way near Riyadh as part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 economic diversification programme, has been co-designed by former F1 driver Alex Wurz and will feature 108 metres of elevation change. There will be a concert space and two theme parks, one of which will boast the world's tallest and fastest roller coaster. It's anticipated that the circuit will be ready in 2027 and, as outlined earlier, host a second event on Saudi territory rather than replacing Jeddah.

Both Rwanda and Argentina have held meaningful talks with F1 and the FIA. Indeed, relations between the African nation and the governing body are such that that, somewhat controversially, Rwanda was due to host the FIA's prestigious annual prize-giving ceremony shortly after this issue of GP Racing closed for print. Rwandan dignitaries attended the 2024 Monaco 🕨

Imola (bottom) may be forced to host GPs every other year. Faced with the same choice Zandvoort (below) chose to quit





2025 date: 5-6 July

Contract until: 2034

Silverstone and its owners were always on shaky ground in the Bernie Ecclestone era but the current management is totally aligned with F1's vision of each grand prix having a broader (and commercially sustainable) offering to paying spectators.

HUNGARY

2025 date: 1-3 August Contract until: 2032

The Hungaroring concluded its latest contract extension in 2023. It had to commit to demolishing the existing – and very dated – pit and paddock facilities and building something more in keeping with modern F1

ITALY-MONZA

2025 date: 5-7 September Contract until: 2031

Over the past two years, Monza has made a huge capital investment in new facilities and track resurfacing and has duly been rewarded with a long-term contract extension as a result.

AZERBAIJAN



2025 date: 19-21 September

Contract until: 2026

Eventful grands prix, growing impact on tourism, governmental desire to keep Azerbaijan on the calendar, plus the involvement of the influential Flavio Briatore (also an investor in business and property in Baku suggest a long future for this race.



SINGAPORE **2025 date:** 3-5 October Contract until: 2028

Now arguably Formula 1's most important destination in terms of deal-making and sponsor-wrangling. The only question is where it fits into the itinerary.



Turkey, with its links to Pirelli, is desperate to get a race back.

Istanbul Park – the new surface aside – could easily hold a GP with very little work needed

GP and met Domenicali in September, with further talks scheduled for December. F1 could shortly be returning to the African content for the first time since 1993.

Any deal would require a facility to be built, though, whereas Argentina already has one – although it hasn't hosted F1 since 1998, and would require updating just as Mexico's did ahead of its return last decade. At 2.68 miles, the twisting infield layout of the Autódromo Oscar y Juan Gálvez is rather short, slow and fiddly; any future F1 event would have to incorporate the longer loop around the Lago de Regates.

A delegation including tourism minister Daniel Scioli and Argentinian automobile federation president Cesar Carman held talks with Domenicali in November amid a surge of F1 interest in that country – chiefly driven by Franco Colapinto, already Argentina's second most famous current sportsman after Lionel Messi. While Argentina's economy is rather frail and its political scene turbulent, it's understood that the grand prix bid is underpinned by private rather than government finance. Despite the state

of the domestic economy Argentina is home to many successful international businesses including Globant, the digital services provider which sponsors F1 *and* Colapinto.

Turkey is even more ready to plugand-play since its Tilke-designed circuit hosted F1 as recently as 2021, a schedule-filler during the Covid era. So eager were the hosts to impress that they resurfaced the entire track, a tactic which backfired when the surprised competitors found the freshly laid surface yielded no grip. More significantly, Istanbul Park now has a different operating company,

one with connections to Pirelli's Turkish division. A commitment to bringing F1 back to Turkey was a pillar of the tender process.

Another country determined to join the calendar is Thailand, which already has a driver on the grid – Alex Albon – as well as a commercial foothold via the Yoovidhya dynasty, inventors of the energy drink known globally as Red Bull. The family retains a 51% stake in Red Bull GmbH.

Domenicali visited Thailand on his way back from the Chinese GP and subsequently held talks with the Thai prime minsiter at the time, Srettha Thavisin. The Thai media has reported that negotiations are sufficiently advanced for a Bangkok street circuit to host a race in 2027, and that confirmation is imminent. F1 cars have taken to the streets of the nation's capital before: Red Bull held a demonstration run there in 2010.

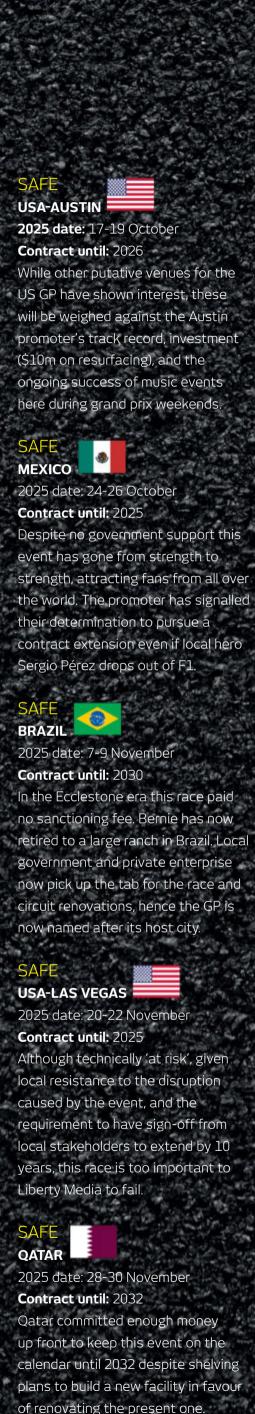
As with all events relying on government largesse, though, the putative Thai GP is beholden to changes in the political scene, especially given the time scales involved. Let's not forget the rapid coming and going of the Vietnam GP, scheduled for 2020: this race was not a victim of Covid but of one of its prime movers, local politician Nguyễn Đức Chung, going to jail...



Thailand's Prime Mnister
Srettha Thavisin met with
Formula 1 CEO Stefano
Domeincali at the Emilia
Romagna GP back in May 2024



Red Bull held one of its demo runs on the Bangkok streets in 2010. It is believed a street circuit in the capital could be ready for the 2027 season





SAFE

ABU DHABI

2025 date: 5-7 December

Contract until: 2030

The UAE's deep pockets ensure the unloved Yas Marina circuit remains on the calendar – and, remarkably, contractually enshrined as the season finale.

AT RISK

ITALY-IMOLA

2025 date: 16-18 May **Contract until:** 2025

The former venue of the San Marino Grand Prix returned to the calendar in 2020 as a Covid contingency. Financial backing from local government and the Automobile Club of Italy kept it there but the current three-year deal is about to end.

AT RISK

SPAIN-BARCELONA

2025 date: 30 May-1 June
Contract until: 2026

The disliked Barcelona track is on borrowed time. A new facility in Madrid will host the Spanish Grand Prix from 2026 so the Catalan track will likely enter rotation, depending on finance, or vanish from the calendar altogether.

AT RISH

BELGIUM

2025 date: 25-27 July

Contract until: 2025

Amid doubts over track safety and commercial sustainability, Spa-Francorchamps has been on one-year rolling deals since 2022. Its iconic status means it's unlikely to disappear entirely but it will likely cease to be annual.

GOING

NETHERLANDS

2025 date: 29-31 August

Contract until: 2026

This event now plans to "go out on a high", in the words of the promoter, after turning down a deal which would have involved rotation. It extended its current contract by one year and will then stop.



Monaco's circuit (above and below) hasn't changed much over time. The GP still sells out but it is no longer seen as the race that Formula 1's deal makers have to attend



How Monaco held on

Famously, Somerset Maugham described this part of the French Riviera as "a sunny place for shady people". It was long an attendant cliché of grand prix racing that Monaco was "the jewel in F1's crown". No longer, it seems.

Over the past few years the principality has had to give up its hold on TV direction of its race, trackside signage, the absurdity of a four-day weekend with the local bank holiday Friday 'off' (a cheeky way of ensuring local businesses enjoy an extra day of takings), and now its coveted end-of-May slot. From 2026 the Monaco GP will take place in early June as part of a contract extension which will take it to 2031.

This has enabled Canada to move to the late-May slot, something Montréal's previous promoter had resisted on the grounds of there being insufficient time to prepare that track's temporary facilities after the retreat of winter. The new promoter has committed to do the job faster.

Monaco is a polarising event, enjoyed by those who attend but derided by those who lament the lack of overtaking – primarily these voices spring from the TV audience but several drivers have voiced criticism too. Apart from the Swimming Pool complex and around La Rascasse, the layout is almost unchanged from the first running of the race in 1929.

The emergence of Singapore as a prime destination for F1's deal-makers has made Monaco less important than it once was, hence the recent flow of concessions to secure contract extensions. The only thing the authorities haven't moved on is the circuit layout – and there are some who think the new development on reclaimed land beyond Portier is a missed opportunity.

The principality owes at least some of its wealth to grand prix racing. Twice in its history the annual motor race has played a part in transforming what was an unloved backwater, presided over by absentee monarchs, into a thriving destination. The first Monaco Grand Prix was a response to the

MONACO IS A POLARISING EVENT, ENJOYED BY THOSE WHO ATTEND BUT DERIDED BY THOSE WHO LAMENT THE LACK OF OVERTAKING – PRIMARILY THESE VOICES SPRING FROM THE TV AUDIENCE

forerunner of the FIA refusing to recognise the Automobile Club de Monaco unless it held an event on Monegasque soil — in those days the rally, then little more than a reliability trial with obscure rules, terminated in the hills above. Race founder Anthony Noghès walked the streets until a layout suggested itself.

After World War II the reborn Monaco GP became the focus of the recently crowned Prince Rainier's efforts to transform the economy and image of a principality mired in more royal scandal and toxic associations with the collaborative Vichy regime. Casino receipts had dropped 90%.

The present monarch, Rainier's son, well knows how important this annual event is to the economy of a location otherwise better known for being a place where wealth is concealed and not shared.

'Brightling'



Despite its 10.95mm height, the Trident C60 Pro 300 'Lumiére' leaps from your wrist. (Just like it jumped off this page.) Its brightness results from proudly protruding indices and the logo they encircle. Featuring facets finely machined to tolerances of 0.03mm, these mini-monoliths are super-legible in daylight. But it's the Globolight®, the unique luminous ceramic from which they're hewn, that produces their astounding, super-brilliance at night. And inspired this timepiece's name. The light show doesn't end there. Carved from titanium, the 41mm case incorporates a second sapphire crystal displaying its super-accurate movement. But it's not the back of this beautiful tool watch you're buying into. Is it?

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FOUR-RING CIRCUS



It's been over two years since Audi announced it would be entering Formula 1. But the performance of the team it's buying has gone south – and there's little hope of meaningful change by the time the Audi logos appear. Heads rolling at executive level add to the impression of disarray. What's been going wrong?

WORDS ANDREW BENSON PIGTURES MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Audi is entering Formula 1 as a works team in 2026. This is not news – it was announced back in August 2022 – but it is worth simply re-stating as a fact because it is a big deal.

Audi is a premium brand of the Volkswagen Group, the world's largest car company, which has never before competed in F1. It is doing so now because of changes made to the sport in recent years – particularly the introduction of budget caps on chassis and now engines, and the adoption of a new style of engine in 2026.

So Audi's entry is a vote of confidence for F1 in both its recent growth and its future trajectory, and a huge development for a car company that has a storied history in motorsport, with successes ranging from Le Mans to rallying and the legendary Pikes Peak climb.

And yet it would be fair to say the project is not exactly perceived to be in the rudest health, and if you want a symbolic representation of that fact, look no further than this year's driver market.

Audi signed Nico Hülkenberg early in the year, fitting its bill of a competitive, experienced, German driver. But its prime target for team leader was Carlos Sainz, who in February lost his seat at Ferrari from 2025 to Lewis Hamilton.

Audi chased the Spaniard long and hard. Yet after months of prevarication, Sainz rejected Audi in favour of Williams, because he felt that was a better option for the next three years of his career.

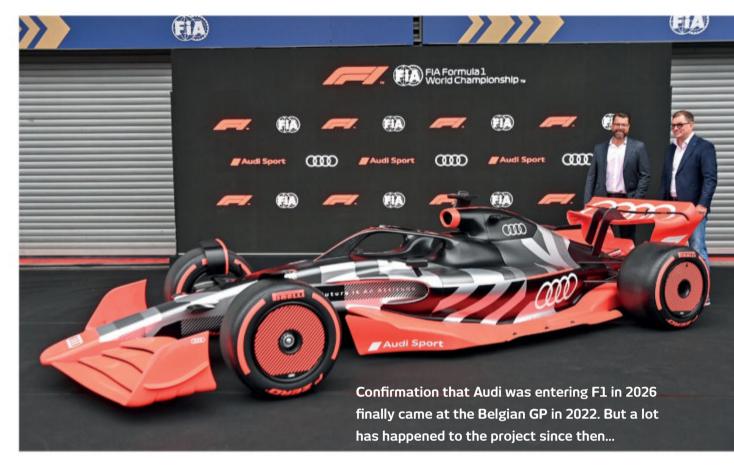
As snubs go, that's a big one. Sainz had hoped for a seat at Red Bull or Mercedes, which his performances since joining McLaren in 2019 and then Ferrari in 2021 justified.

But when those teams decided to go in other directions, he chose a private team going through a rebuilding process (and a difficult season that has left it ninth in the constructors' championship) over the factory programme of a major car manufacturer for whom his father still competes on the Dakar Rally.

And Audi is not just any car manufacturer. It has won Le Mans 13 times – second behind only Porsche, also a VW Group brand.

VW dominated the world rally championship from 2013-16. It holds the record at Pikes Peak with its electric ID.R prototype. It won the Dakar Rally four times in a row from 2008-11.

And while this is Audi's first foray into F1, its predecessor Auto Union won the European championship, forerunner of the world championship, in 1936, and ran Mercedes close in 1937 and '38. It is associated with two of the greatest drivers of the era, Tazio Nuvolari and Bernd Rosemeyer.



BALL OF CONFUSION

On paper, then, and in terms of conventional F1 wisdom, Sainz's choice appears a baffling one. But it becomes easier to understand when one looks more closely at developments since Audi announced its intention to enter F1 nearly two and a half years ago.

Since then, the project has been marked by confusing communications, disruption and no obvious progress.

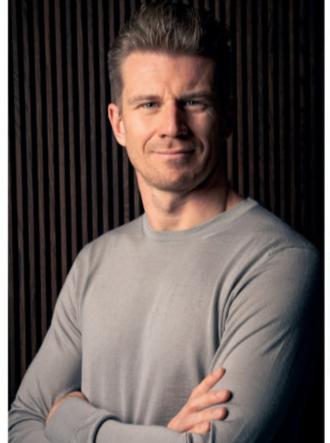
When the project was announced, Audi did not

Audi will enter F1 with at least one strong driver, having signed Nico Hülkenberg (below), but it missed out on securing Carlos Sainz (below, right)

even say what its plan was, although everyone in F1 knew it was going to buy Sauber, as rival BMW had for its works effort from 2006, and become a team owner which built its own engines.

The project did not have a leader until December 2022, when Andreas Seidl left his role as McLaren team principal to become chief executive officer of Sauber, charged with preparing the ground for Audi's entry. When he did, it soon became clear that the original plan had been for Seidl not to join until 2025. Had it not got Seidl early, who would have led the project until then?

And there was a convoluted share-transfer process, which left former Sauber owner Finn Rausing still the majority owner of the team for





that first full season and therefore limited the investment that was needed to start turning the team around. At the time of writing, in late November 2024, Rausing still owns 25% of the shares.

Through 2023, Seidl kept a low profile and Sauber – or Alfa Romeo as it was then known – finished ninth in the championship. It became known within F1 that Seidl felt he was fighting to get Audi to take F1 seriously enough, commit sufficient resource and move fast enough. He realised how much work was needed to turn Sauber into a team worthy of sustaining the F1 entry of a global car company, but felt Audi itself did not, it was said.

Early in 2024, it was announced that Audi would take full control of the team earlier than expected – by the end of the year. But results got even worse, and now there were also rumours that the project to design the 2026 engine was not showing the same progress as the programmes of the existing companies in F1. And there was a growing split between Seidl and Oliver Hoffmann, the Audi board member responsible for Sauber.

It became clear one of them would have to go. In July, Audi sacked both, and announced that former Ferrari team boss Mattia Binotto had been hired as chief technical and operating officer, reporting to a new Audi board executive, Gernot Döllner. A week later, it emerged that Red Bull sporting director Jonathan Wheatley would join in 2025 as team principal.

This change, it emerged, had arisen from an internal review of the F1 programme.

TRY SOMETHING NEW

Dollner said at a news conference held by himself and Binotto at the Italian Grand Prix: "It was never questioned that F1 is a great motorsport platform, the pinnacle of motorsports.

"We just re-evaluated whether our setup was the right one, and as you know we then came up to take over complete responsibilities for Sauber earlier than expected, and then a second step we now established a future-oriented management structure. It was more how to organise and how to move on."

At the same time, goals were reset. Back in 2022, the stated ambition was for Audi to be competing for the world title within three years. Now, that became five.

"We see our Formula 1 project as a long-term project," Döllner said, "and after I joined Audi in September of last year, we did an evaluation and it ended up with the setup we found and we maybe recalibrated our time path to a



VW/Audi has never previously entered F1, but Audi has had great success in sportscars, winning the Le Mans 24 Hours 13 times

more realistic one. We are quite realistic when `it comes to timing."

Döllner has also re-emphasised Audi's commitment to Formila 1. "Audi and F1 for me is a perfect fit," he said. "The new rules perfectly fit our corporate strategy."

The new rules are why Audi has decided finally to commit to F1, in two different ways. The budget cap on chassis and, from 2026, engines, means manufacturers no longer have to commit an effectively bottomless pit of money to success in F1. They can spend only as much as they are allowed – currently \$135m on the car and \$95m on the engine per year.

That's attractive for two reasons — the plain financial aspect of it, but also the knowledge that they are competing on a level playing field. Because of the cap, F1 teams can now start to be seen as profitable businesses in themselves, on a purely bottom-line basis. Add in the value of the brand exposure from 24 live broadcasts a year, which manufacturers calculate to run into the billions, and the financial case is straightforward.

Then there are the specifics of the rules themselves. From 2026, the hybrid part of the engine will be responsible for providing about 50% of the total power output. In combination with the use of fully sustainable renewable fuels, that makes the engine technology absolutely in line with the corporate strategy of Audi as a car company.



"AUDI AND F1 FOR ME IS A PERFECT FIT, THE NEW RULES PERFECTLY FIT OUR CORPORATE STRATEGY" GERNOT DÖLLNER





Within F1, questions have been raised about the new engines. The change has been expensive for the existing manufacturers, and required new aerodynamics rules, which include compromises – the need to recover sufficient energy to power the battery has led to the introduction of moveable aerodynamics to increase top speeds and therefore braking distances.

And there is the question of the wisdom of changing the rules as the field closes up, which likely results in a shuffle of the order and a more spread-out field, at least initially.

CORPORATION TAXING

But on a big-picture level, it is hard to argue against the idea that the rules have been a success in one significant way already. Audi is not the only manufacturer attracted by them. Ford is also entering in 2026 in partnership with Red Bull. Honda had decided to pull out, only to reverse that decision because of the new engines. And General Motors has now committed to a new entry from 2026.

Without the new engine rules, none of that would be happening. Renault has just ended its F1 programme. Which would have left Mercedes and Ferrari as F1's only engine suppliers. Although perhaps Renault's engine programme would still exist if the rules had not changed.

But Audi is not in F1 for the exposure alone. It's one thing knowing that a project will be profitable and fits with a company's ethos. Audi wants and needs to win – not only, but not least, because one of its major market rivals will be a direct competitor on track, Mercedes.

Within F1, the appearance of a project with a troubled gestation is perceived to have only heightened the relevance of questions that were already there from the beginning – would Audi and VW approach F1 in the right way?

The VW Group is a giant, successful company with its own way of doing things. Just as Toyota was – and Toyota's F1 programme, which ran from 2002-9, is always held up as the prime example of how not to do F1.

Toyota is notorious for failing to win a race despite spending what is widely regarded as possibly the biggest budget ever in F1. It tried to form an F1 team out of the corporate structure. That inevitably led to bureaucracy and delays,



when an F1 team needs to be nimble and reactive. Audi says it is fully aware of the pitfalls.

"We are absolutely independent in handling this project," Döllner says. "With the new setup, we also improved to make the F1 project fast and independent from any corporate process.

"We are totally aware it is necessary to keep this project away from corporate processes. Only when it comes to marketing and some design aspects and of course sponsorship we need the link. But otherwise the decisions have to be taken in Hinwil. That's our first priority."

ENERGY CRISIS

As for the conspicuous lack of progress a Sauber since Audi took over — it recently finished last in the championship, despite a small late-season rally with some upgrades that did finally improve the car — Binotto admits the way the programme has been run so far has had an effect.

"When Audi bought some shares and had the programme to become the full owner in the future," Binotto says, "internally some plans have been done, some strategic plans have been discussed and established but not yet come to execution. So Sauber have been remaining in a limbo for a while. Second, certainly let's say some of the focus and energies were put towards 2026, to try to make sure Audi was ready to start in 2026 and that took off some energy on the normal development path for 2024 and 2025."

Binotto knows the size of the task ahead, calling it "enormous", adding: "It's not only climbing a big mountain, it's climbing Everest. It will take several years. Our objective is by the end of the



Andreas Seidl, the project's first CEO and Oliver Hoffmann, the Audi board member overseeing Sauber, never hit it off and both were sacked



Gernot Döllner, Audi AG's CEO, is now chairman of Sauber, and former Ferrari team principal Mattia Binotto – the new COO – reports to him

decade to fight for championships.'

He adds: "I knew Sauber a bit before from my past experience supplying (Ferrari) engines and gearboxes for many years so I had already been here in Hinwil at the factory, so somehow I knew what I would have expected.

"But when you are here and you start looking into the details, the more you look, the more you realise where you are and what are the main differences to what I knew before from Ferrari.

"Certainly the gap and the differences are many and the gap is big. As a matter of fact if you look at the classifications, we know the gap is big. It's big because of dimensions, because of the number of people, because of mindset, because of tools, facilities. Whatever you look around at, it is really comparing a small team to a top team.

"Certainly we are today all aware what is the task and how much it will take to get to the top. Normally it takes many years for a top team already to turn into a winning cycle. For us, we need as well to climb the mountain."

The immediate task, he says, is to "create foundations, create the culture, create the





mindset, and in parallel putting in place all the tools that are required to do a great car."

Even since the restructure of the F1 project, Audi has faced questions. In November, the wider Audi car company reported a 91% slump in earnings on the back of Chinese sales collapsing, amid a 42% drop in profits for VW.

Audi is reported to be considering plant closures and has tabled a 10% pay cut. But it insists the F1 programme is "not in question".

Before the Qatar Grand Prix, it was announced that the Gulf state's sovereign investment arm — which is the third largest shareholder in Audi — would take a minority stake in the team. This is not a reaction to the sales figures, but it does take the pressure off the F1 project by ensuring the financial liability is not all held by Audi itself.

Binotto says: "We are in F1 until we win and next after. It is a long-term commitment. We have joined F1 to be here and stay here.

"We intend to become a winning team and to set the benchmark and to stay then. It is not a joining and leaving. F1 is the pinnacle of the motorsport. It is great Audi is part of it finally and they are simply committed to stay."

Andrew Benson is BBC Sport's F1 correspondent

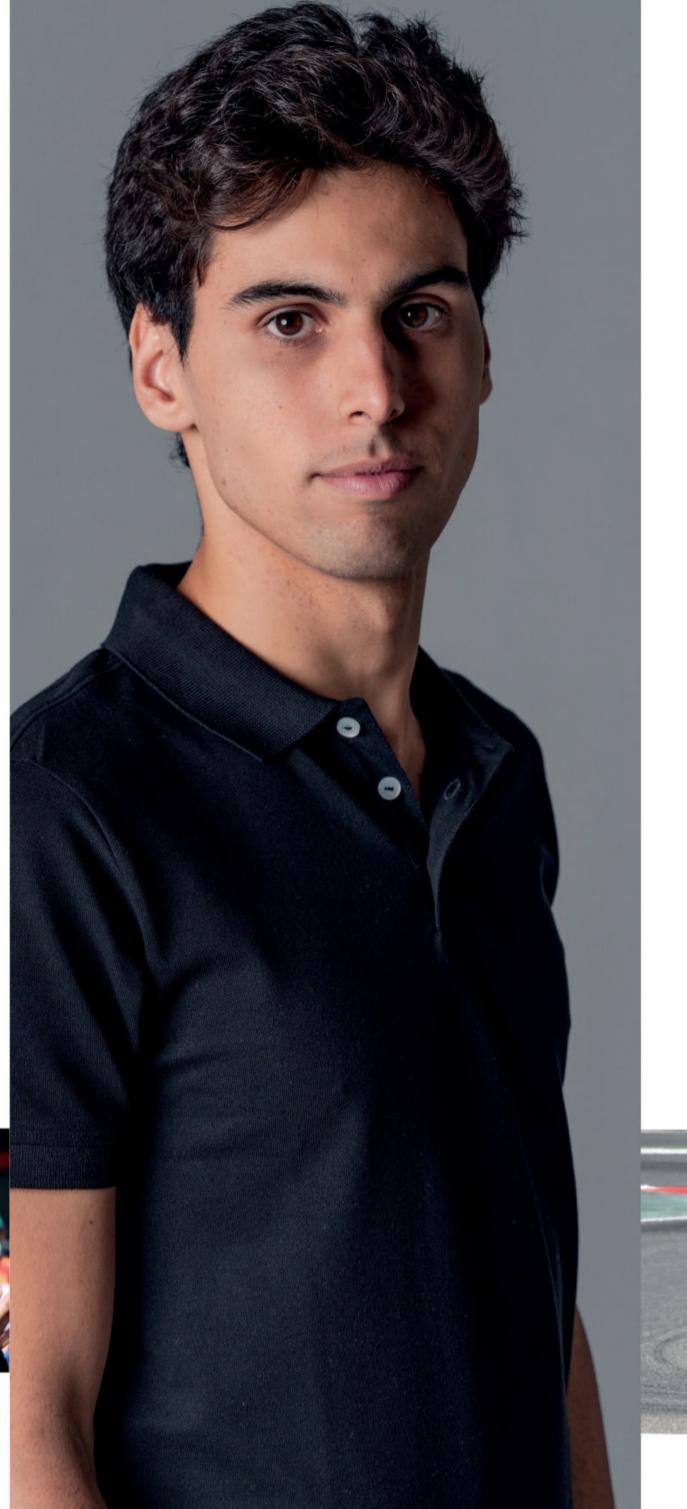
33 RINGER STATE OF THE STATE OF

Brazil, the home of three Formula 1 champions, hasn't had a full-time representative on the grid since 2017. Next season junior-ladder hotshot **Gabriel Bortoleto** will become the 33rd Brazilian to fly the flag – could he become its fourth drivers' champion?

WORDS OLEG KARPOV



With Andrea Stella after an F2 race. Bortoleto was picked up by McLaren for its junior programme, but released to join Sauber/Audi for 2025 (right)





bsent from the grid – apart from Pietro Fittipaldi's cameo appearance in 2020 – since 2017. No victories since 2009. The last world title in 1991... if you ignore Felipe Massa's 20 seconds of champion-elect glory at the end of 2008, of course. Brazil, the country which produced three multiple F1 champions in two decades at the end of the last century, has recently struggled to bring young, promising drivers to the pinnacle of motorsport.

But Gabriel Bortoleto could be the man to not only end that drought, but also reintroduce fans back home to the joy of seeing their countryman succeed. His CV, which now includes consecutive titles in both F3 and F2 in his debut seasons in the categories, suggests that he's not in F1 just to wear an overall and make up the numbers.

Bortoleto is a textbook example of the latest generation of drivers who have lived and breathed racing from a very young age. He started karting just a few years after learning to walk. He moved out of his parents' home in his early teens to pursue his motorsport dream. And he spends most of his free time now – eight to ten hours a day, he says – behind the wheel of his own sim.

"It started with my brother, Enzo" recalled Bortoleto in an interview last year. "He's six years older than me, and started racing at seven, but because of the finances at the time, he stopped for four or five years — and then came back. I was six, turning seven, so I went to the races.

"I liked [seeing] all the kids on the podium, winning trophies and stuff. I was like, 'Man, I want this.' I told my father, 'I want to try.' So he gave me the opportunity, but with no practice,

Bortoleto's breakthrough year was 2023 when he raced for Trident in FIA F3. Two early feature race wins were the bedrock of his title success

nothing, he just threw me in the race – bam – so I was spinning the whole race, [and] everyone was making fun of me. But there were [only] six go-karts, and in Brazil, we have six places on the podium, so I got my trophy in my first race!"

His path isn't exactly a Cinderella narrative compared with many Brazilian drivers who made their way to Europe over previous decades, since money wasn't among the main obstacles during his junior career. As Gabriel's hobby turned into a career, his father Lincoln Oliveira, a businessman in telecoms, was not only able to provide the necessary financial support as his son climbed the rather expensive junior motorsport ladder, but also made sure he had all the support he needed when the family decided to send him to Europe.

He was accompanied by his first coach, Francesco di Mauro, whom Gabriel now calls his "second dad", when he moved to Italy aged 13.

"His son is a professional driver, very successful in Brazil, who did karting in Europe," said Bortoleto of his first coach. "We were in our beach house and my father asked him, 'What does Gabriel have to do to become an F1 driver?' – because that was my dream. And the guy said, 'OK, he needs to go to Europe'. So my father looked at me and said, 'Pack your bags because in one month you're moving to Europe.' And then he said [to the coach], 'Are you able to go with him?'

"The guy was a bit in shock, because it was the beginning also of our relationship as coach and driver, so he didn't know my father so well. [But] he said yes, so they moved to Europe, to Italy,



Gabriel's brother, Enzo, was the first Bortoleto to come to Europe, racing in British F3 in 2016, when he finished 11th in the championship

with me, him and his wife, and we started the season in 2016. Mid-2016 we did some races, and in 2017 we moved to Europe to live there."

Gabriel in turn delivered, becoming one of the top karters in Europe and eventually making a smooth transition to cars, winning races in his first F4 season and then in FRECA as well. But the real breakthrough came in 2023, when Bortoleto was taken under the wing of the A14 management company, run by none other than Fernando Alonso and his associates Albert Resclosa Coll and Alberto Fernández Albilares.

It was with their help that Bortoleto secured a contract with the Trident team in F3, where he won the title in his first season, before moving straight to F2 – now with the support of McLaren. The Brazilian became the Woking team's junior driver last winter and, although the original plan didn't include an F1 promotion as early as 2025, Bortoleto delivered when it mattered most. After struggling at the start of the season, he climbed to the top of the standings by early autumn.

This rich run of form attracted the interest of Audi, looking for another driver for 2025 after Carlos Sainz wriggled off the hook. McLaren, with no vacancies for the foreseeable future, agreed to release him. The deal, fittingly, was announced on the São Paulo GP weekend: Bortoleto will become the 33rd Brazilian F1 driver, and the first since Pietro Fittipaldi filled in for Romain Grosjean in the final two races of the 2020 season.

Given Bortoleto's performances in the junior series, it's likely his F1 career will be rather longer. 🙃



F1 UNCOVERED

A RACE WEEKEND WITH...

Known informally as 'bolters' within the Formula 1 firmament, mechanics are the unsung heroes who keep the show on the road. It's a story of long hours and unexpected challenges – but, as Haas chief mechanic

Toby Brown

explains, you get used to being ready for anything...

INTERVIEW OLEG KARPOV
PICTURES DOM ROMNEY, ZAK MAUGER,
ANDY HONE, LUBOMIR ASENOV





ith 24 races on the calendar now, working in Formula 1 is a mental and physical challenge like never before. You may have noticed the drivers expressing some disgruntlement over the packed schedule towards the end of the year – and they're staying in five-star hotels and flying either first class or private.

The reality for the team mechanics is truly brutal. They're the ones arriving at the venue almost a week before the race and leaving six hours after the chequered flag drops on Sunday. The packing up process begins before the race ends.

It's not just the people who start to show some signs of wear and tear, but the cars themselves. In this era of the budget cap there is less of a throwaway culture. Teams often arrive at the final races with components that, while still within their 'life', have seen a fair bit of use – because producing new ones to replace those nearing the end of their life cycles isn't always an option owing to budget restrictions.

And it's up to the mechanics to ensure every aspect of the car remains robust, safe, and capable of delivering peak performance.

In Qatar – the penultimate round of the 2024 championship – a high-speed track configuration which required drivers to spend a lot of the time on the kerbs meant Haas chief mechanic Toby Brown spent the weekend paying additional attention to brake ducts and floors, as well as trying to look after his crew in the garage.

Here's how it went.

THURSDAY

11.30

Arrival at the track

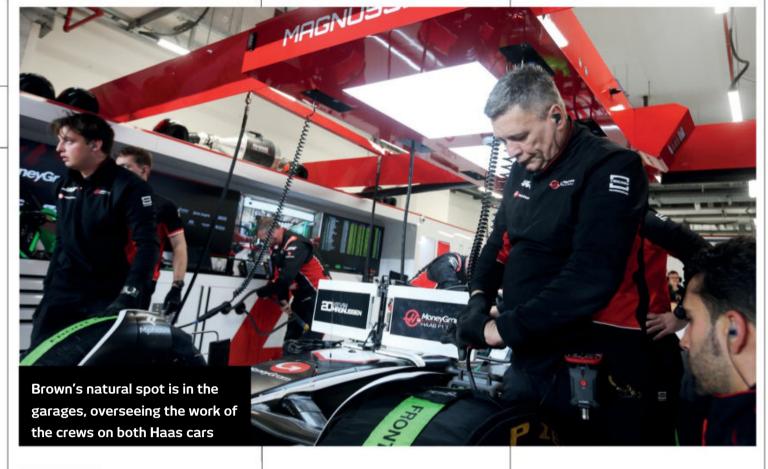
For most of the guys this was our third day at the track. We arrived on Tuesday but due to some customs delay – which impacted multiple teams – we weren't able to touch the cars and some of the work was delayed until Wednesday.

But because the front and rear suspensions go through a two-race cycle, the cars stayed together between Las Vegas and here. The aim is to leave the cars in one piece when we finish on Wednesday night and it all went smoothly.

There was another delay on Thursday morning as we arrived at half past eleven but couldn't get into the track because they were still doing security checks. So we started about an hour later.

The first thing is the setup work. The setup sheet usually comes in on the Tuesday, so we put all the values into the car on a Wednesday and finish it on a Thursday morning as we build both cars complete.

The most important thing on both Wednesday and Thursday is to make sure we have all the correct specs of the parts on the cars.



13.30

Legality checks

The next milestone is all the legality checks. The FIA don't check you before an event, so it's up to us to make sure the car is legal. We've got all the same tools that they do. Some things, like the flexibility checks on both wings, are done at the factory, and here it's mainly about the bodywork. We as a team declare our CAD model to the FIA and then we have to make sure that our cars don't deviate from our submission by more than three millimetres either way – so the window is very small. And it's quite a long process because you have a sort of scanner and you follow the

programme going through a lot of points. Then it gets uploaded to the server so the engineers can look at it and make any adjustments if necessary.

Usually it goes smoothly, but sometimes there are surprises — like a couple of events before we changed the gearbox, and when we fitted the rear wing, which had passed all the tests with the previous one, it was suddenly outside the legality window — so we had to do some good old-fashioned grinding.

16.30

Fire up

Then we take the cars apart

somewhat for the fire-up. And that is basically to make sure that everything is working as it should – which usually takes about an hour. Again, there is a checklist of all the procedures. If you've been watching F1 for a long time, you'll have noticed how much the reliability has improved over the years. These cars just don't break down anymore, and it's all down to the checks we do. Every Thursday, all the teams spend hours checking that everything is working perfectly.

This time, everything was fine, so at about half past five we started making some setup changes — believe it or not, even before we hit the track for the first time. But that's standard procedure, because the engineers might change their minds after talking to the drivers or get some new ideas, so it's always an evolving thing.

21.15

Pitstop practice

It was a fairly calm day, so we actually started our pitstop practice a little earlier than planned. As usual we did about 11-12 stops, all went well, and we left the track about 45 minutes before curfew.

It's part of my job to look after the guys. It's 24 races a year – and when I started in 2003 we had 16. So it's a tough calendar and for me the curfew time is just an advisory. If we can finish earlier, we can go home earlier – and especially at this time of year, it's good for morale.



FRIDAY

12.00

Arrival at the track

We arrived at noon, had breakfast and went straight to work: there are a few things to do in the morning before practice. First, there's the fire-up: this time it's fairly quiet and straightforward. We don't take the floor off, the bodywork stays on the car – because all the checks were done the day before and this is more of a precaution. So we warm the car up a bit, fire it up at a given time and check everything is still OK.

Car presentation

Then it's time for the 'car presentation'. Both cars have to be complete. One has to stay in the garage and the other is pushed into the pitlane for the journalists, photographers and TV crews to see. For the media it's a chance to see the latest changes and for us it's a bit of a break. For me personally, there's a bit of administration, doing job lists, preparing for the next event and stuff like that – all pretty boring.

We also use this time to do more pitstop practice since the car is complete and already in the pitlane.

The hour or so before the first practice we do the cooling changes – because the aero guys check the weather and can send out the latest settings. As soon as we get the cars back in, we take them apart and do these changes: blanking, internal blanking, brake ducts, brake drums. There are seven different specs for brake cooling – sometimes we even fit asymmetric parts - and it's up to the engineers to tell us which ones they want for the session.

16.30

Free practice 1

We have a detailed plan for each practice session: tyre sets, fuel, number of laps and so on - and our priority is to stick to that plan. There aren't any big setup changes during the session, as it's only an hour and it's more important to do laps than be stuck in the garage. So, apart from changing tyres, we

measure the plank and adjust the ride height if necessary. This track is quite smooth, so the changes weren't that big - unlike Interlagos, for example, where nobody expected the resurfaced track to be so bumpy.

We raised the ride height quite dramatically there, also for the drivers' comfort, because they said it was the worst it's ever been.

This time we had three runs and everything went well.



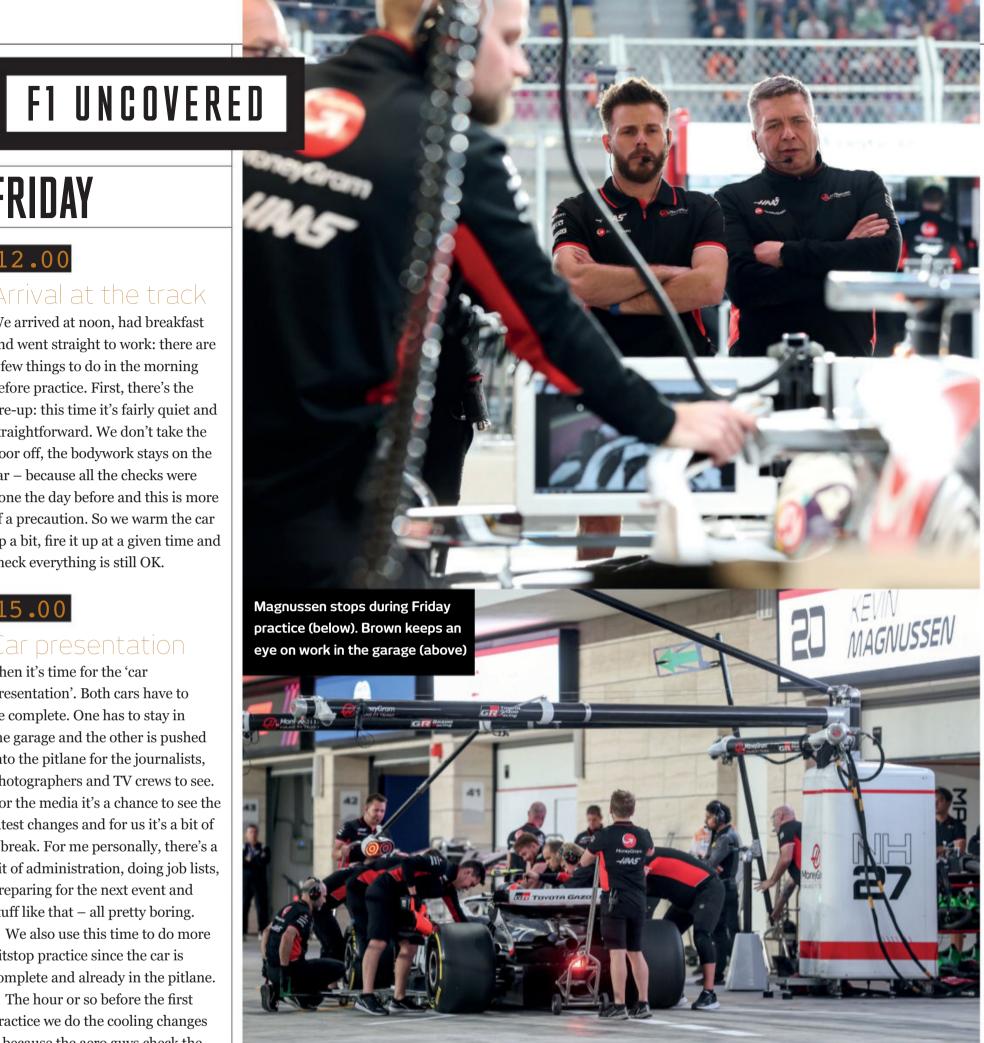
Sprint qualifying

There is a three-hour gap between sessions and we get the new setup sheet about an hour before the start of sprint qualifying. There's no time to make any time-consuming changes, so it's usually limited to a few suspension settings and wings.

The session itself was good, with Nico [Hülkenberg] getting through to Q3 again. Kevin [Magnussen]'s car was nominated for a scan with the FIA, so we took it to their garage. The inspection itself takes about 20

minutes, but you're held up for about an hour.

Then we came back, took the floor off both cars, checked if there was any damage. And towards the end of the year, when some of the parts are getting quite old, we'll do more repairs on those little bits of floor or brake ducts. This circuit is pretty tough in that respect. The cars run on the kerbs for about a quarter of the lap and, because of the vibration, it's breaking all the bodywork. So after both sessions we had to either replace brake ducts or repair them, which sometimes means just gluing them back together.



SATURDAY

13.00

Repairs and preparations for the sprint race

First thing this morning we had to put one of the brake ducts back on the car that was damaged in the sprint shootout the day before.

We have a pool of parts, but towards the end of the season we won't be getting any new ones, so we have to balance a bit. Obviously the most damaged parts go to the back of the queue. Our reliability engineers keep track of all the repairs. And we also have to inform the FIA. In some cases you can do a self-declared repair: so I take a photo of the part before we repair it, let them know what we're going to do, and after their approval we can carry on.

This time it was a brake duct winglet and another aero part that was damaged. So on Friday evening I had to email the FIA to get their approval – and once we got it we took the part off and repaired it. In the morning it was ready to go back on the car.

17.00

Sprint race

The pitlane opens at 16.30, half an hour before the start. We go to the grid just before that, collect the cars as they arrive and take them to their starting positions.

My main objective is to make



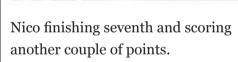
Saturday was a busy day for all concerned (above and below) including Brown (right)

sure we have everything we need and that everything is on time. There is a strict procedure before the race with several key points. I stay with one car and another engineer is there with the other to make sure the timing is correct.

With three minutes to go, there can only be eight people per car on the grid, so we have to make sure everyone's gone and only those who are supposed to be there are left.

Then we come back. I usually help push one of the tyre trolleys back into the garage – and then we get ready for the race. It's my job to make sure everyone is in their place in the garage before the start.

The race itself went well, with



The cars came back in good shape but, as the parts were getting long in the tooth, we had to fix some damaged brake ducts again as well as some floor edges.

We also have to go through a checklist. The brakes are measured and replaced if necessary, we take the floor off to see if everything is still OK, and just carry on with the repairs to get the cars ready for qualifying.



We didn't make any major changes to our cars since the engineers were relatively happy with the performance in the sprint race. Nico got knocked out in Q1, which had nothing to do with him or us, but Kevin made it through to Q3.

After the session it was more of the same: floor off, brake ducts to repair. At that point I was pretty sure we'd have to run the cars with a few winglets missing for the next event in Abu Dhabi.

Later that night we were called back to the FIA for a rear wing pullback test and a scan on Nico's car. That was supposed to be done at midnight, but we got there a little sooner so that everyone could go home a little earlier.





SUNDAY

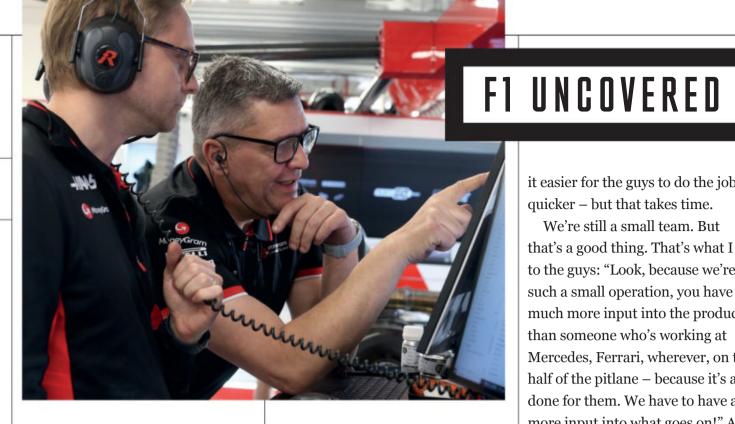
FIA legality checks

When I got back to the hotel last night, around 1am, I had another invitation from the FIA - for another test this morning. So they've really liked spending time with us this week.

They always select randomly who they invite over the weekend. Some races I go down there every day, like this week, some races I don't. But you have to expect to see them more the better you do.

They only do certain checks. We've done the front wing check, I'd say four times this year, and the front floor flexibility, which is how much the floor flexes up, about five times.

It's always a bit of an exam feeling. And in Monaco we failed. We had a new rear wing and with the previous one we knew exactly where the limitation was. So we measured it as usual – and we were sure we'd be all clear. When I



saw their tool go through the DRS slot, I just couldn't believe it. And that's because the limitation was in a different place, but we hadn't checked that particular tiny gap on the outer edge.

The FIA guys understood that it was a fair mistake and how we made it, but they just didn't have any choice but to disqualify us.

I guess that was the one for experience... Now we are scrupulously checking.

Everything was fine this weekend and we were done with the checks, we got the cars ready to fire up, took the floors off, made sure everything still worked as it should, and put the back together again.

15.15

Final pitstop practice

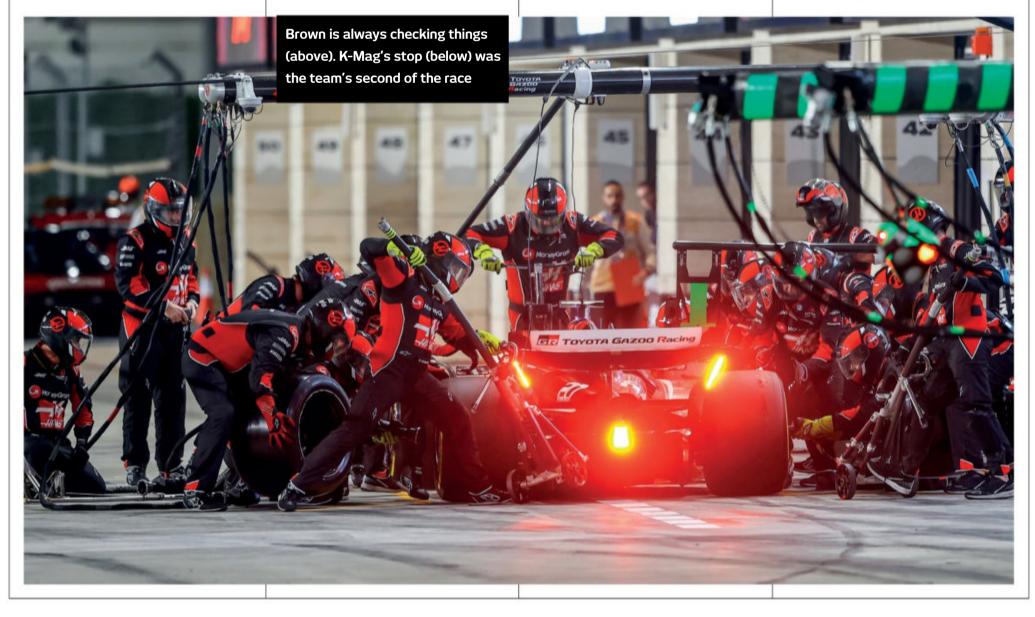
All the stops went really well. We've had a pretty good year with pitstops to be fair. At the last event in Vegas we were one of the most consistent teams throughout the pitlane. We're not the fastest, but consistency is what you need. It was quite an achievement because it's no secret our pitstop equipment isn't as advanced as some teams. So when we do well, I think it's because the guys are doing a great job and outperforming the equipment. We have an ongoing project to try and bring in new things and make

it easier for the guys to do the job quicker – but that takes time.

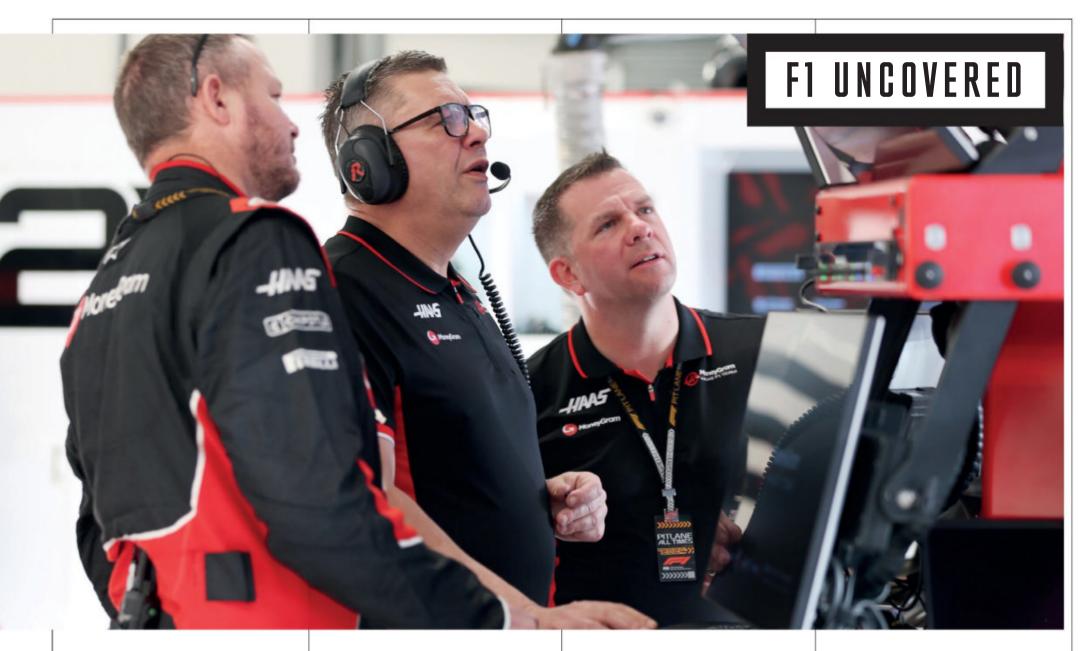
We're still a small team. But that's a good thing. That's what I say to the guys: "Look, because we're such a small operation, you have so much more input into the product than someone who's working at Mercedes, Ferrari, wherever, on that half of the pitlane – because it's all done for them. We have to have a lot more input into what goes on!" And to their credit, we've had a really good year with pitstops.

We've spent so much time together that we work really well as a group. We all know each other. We bond a lot. We went on a teambuilding trip last year and I'd say within the first hour the people who were doing the course just said, "You don't need it because you're already a team." It was one of those courses for people who work in an office and have never spoken to the guy who's sitting 15 metres away. We live in each other's pockets for over 24 weeks a year. So we all get along!

Once that's done, it's time to grab lunch, get your suit on and get ready for the race.







SUNDAY: GRAND PRIX

19.00

The race

The pitlane opens 40 minutes before the race, so we get to the grid just before that. It's all standard procedure and I'm there to go between two cars to make sure everything is working, we have power in the generators, that electrically we're all OK. With five minutes to go I help push one of the trolleys back, but stay on the pitwall to make sure I see both cars leave their grid positions. I then go back to the garage and check we're ready for any emergency pitstops. This time we had to do one right after the start after Nico's incident in Turn 1. He came back with a puncture, but the car was OK – so we sent him back.

Kevin finished ninth, so we got some more points, but Gasly, who we were fighting with, got lucky with the Safety Car, which gave him a good position in fifth.

After the race we have to go to scrutineering. We didn't have any checks on Kevin's car, it was just weighed and we were free to take it. Then we collected Nico's car since he spun off in the race. It was delivered to the end of the pitlane and we took it back to the garage.

21.00

Packing up

Again, despite Nico's off, both cars were in good shape. We're lucky

that we have two experienced drivers so they don't crash as often, which is a really big plus. When you look at Williams, with everything that's been going on recently, you really feel for them.

I have to do a report for the engineers, taking lots of weights and measurements of different parts of the car. I take lots of

pictures, put them in an album, upload them to a server and share the link – so they can see all the photos of the damage and all the attrition we've had.

Then it's time to pack up, which usually takes a good five or six hours, before we finally head to the hotel for one last night in Qatar before heading to Abu Dhabi. 🙃









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by H. Moser & Cie.

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DIFFICULT SECOND ALBON

A self-confessed "late bloomer", **Alex Albon** has reinvented himself over three seasons at Williams after being ejected from the Red Bull young-driver stable. But now, over 100 races into his career, he's facing what could be his most challenging season yet...

WORDS STUART CODLING PICTURES MOTORSPORT IMAGES AND WILLIAMS

itting a century of grand prix starts isn't quite the landmark it used to be.

Calendar expansion in Formula 1's late-capitalism era requires a driver to stay in the game for just five years to pass it – easier for some than others, of course. Still, it always made one's eyeballs rotate when team spin doctors insisted on describing Lance Stroll as "a rookie" when he had contested more GPs than Jackie Stewart.

Alex Albon concurs.

"It's odd because it's happened so quickly," he told reporters at a conference in Austin to celebrate his centenary at the US Grand Prix. "I feel like five years in F1 isn't that much time... But it's a nice moment to reflect, see where I've come from, see the driver I've become, and still in the future be someone better.

"I'm a year later than my immediate colleagues, Lando [Norris] and George [Russell], but I guess I can celebrate this one and get all the attention..."

The reason he hit his hundredth grand prix a year later than his fellow 2019 rookies is that he spent a season 'parked' in DTM, courtesy of the ongoing omnishambles that is Red Bull's young-driver programme. Albon had already been dropped once by Red Bull, after a disappointing Formula Renault 2.0 season in 2012, only to receive a surprise call-up to the Toro Rosso F1 squad six years later when the energy drinks enterprise found itself short on junior options.

After just half a season he was promoted to the senior team to replace the struggling Pierre Gasly, only to be dropped again at the end of 2020 when Red Bull's leaders decided to recruit from outside the pool, partnering Sergio Pérez with Max Verstappen instead. He spent 2021 juggling DTM with Red Bull simulator duties, only entering an F1 cockpit proper when the team used a 'filming day' for Albon to re-enact Lewis Hamilton's line through Copse on the opening lap of the British GP, in an unsuccessful bid to persuade the FIA to reinvestigate the incident between Hamilton and Verstappen. A 2022 F1 seat with Williams represented a career lifeline he's fully exploited.

He says now the year in DTM was useful since it gave him the space to reflect on the two Toro Rosso/Red Bull years, analyse what went wrong, and identify his strengths and weaknesses. From not even having a manager he built a support mechanism around him, led by former Williams and Red Bull PR man Jacques Heckstall-Smith. Williams insiders say there was never any doubt about Albon's speed – he just needed confidence.

That self-belief is now manifest in the very

Albon was handed his route back into Formula 1 with Williams for the 2022 season



A year 'out' in DTM, after being dropped by Red Bull, gave Albon time to re-focus



IT'S KNOWN THAT RED BULL OFFERED ALBON A 'FIRST-OPTION' DEAL FOR 2026 BEFORE HE AGREED HIS LATEST RENEWAL WITH WILLIAMS. HE IS ONE OF SEVERAL DRIVERS RED BULL'S LEADERS ARE INTERESTED IN IF THE CURRENT OPTIONS DON'T PAN OUT



City or the smog of São Paulo causing brains to experience a shortage of oxygen, but even experienced F1 figures have seemingly lost their heads over the permutations of who might move from one team to the other now Williams has three quick drivers on the books. Recently Juan Pablo Montoya set aside his burger long enough to tell a Colombian radio station that Red Bull should snap up Sainz rather than pitching for

Colapinto – an absurd proposition given that, rather like the cast of the *Carry On* films, Sainz and Verstappen loathe each other and their

with Franco for not less than £20m.

suddenly under considerable pressure. In an instant his former boss, Red Bull team principal Christian Horner, was sniffing around Williams. Word circulated that Vowles was willing to part

Perhaps it was the thin air at altitude in Mexico

grown-up way he now openly pushes his team to do better when it falls short on the operational side, such as at the Italian GP when he chided the pitwall for a pitstop timing that left him having to push too hard on his out-lap to maintain track position. Team principal James Vowles has praised Albon for being a "real leader" and, back in May, concluded a contract extension that will tie Alex in to Williams until the end of 2026.

The questions now are whether Albon will retain the leadership mantle as he's joined by GP winner Carlos Sainz next season – and whether

Colapinto, seen here chasing him in Brazil, has been a much harder challenge for Albon Williams really will, as Vowles claims, sacrifice performance in 2025 to focus resources on the incoming '26 rules package. Into the mix has come Franco Colapinto, the Argentinan Williams protégé who replaced the underperforming Logan Sargeant at Monza and who has subsequently generated considerable excitement in Milton Keynes as well as Latin America.

Such was Franco's pace in his early races

– he outqualified Albon in their second race
as team-mates, though there were mitigating
circumstances – that many observers began
to revise their opinions of Albon. His churlish
complaint – subsequently retracted – about being
"dive bombed" by Colapinto on the opening lap
in Singapore was held up as evidence of a driver



Albon jokes with his partner for 2025 Sainz, who is a upgrade on previous team-mates

respective camps have ruled out such a move.

While the situation remains fluid, it's known that Red Bull offered Albon a 'first-option' deal for 2026 before he agreed his latest renewal with Williams. He is one of several drivers Red Bull's leaders are interested in if the current options don't pan out — especially since Verstappen's plans after his present contract are unknown.

All of which makes the 2025 season more critical to Albon and Williams than might previously have been expected. If Albon is to plot a trajectory back to one of F1's top teams he needs to make an impression against an established winner who will be his toughest team-mate since 2020. Alex believes he's a more complete driver now than the inexperienced newcomer who wilted against Verstappen five years ago.

Now's the time to prove it.







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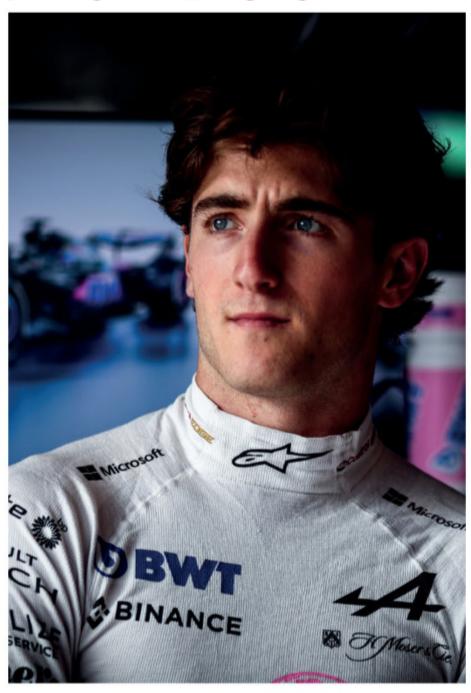


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JACK DOOHAN



THINGS ILOVE



Alpine's protégé on his passion for surfing and his love of penne pomodoro and sushi



Surfing

When I get free time and I could do anything, it would be surfing. Obviously Australia is the best place to do it, but in the modern world we have the luxury of having wave pools with artificial waves. There is a wave pool about an hour and a half from Geneva and we often go there with Mick Schumacher – and I also try to explore different places around the world. For example, there's a good surf spot in São Paulo and also in Abu Dhabi. So surfing is a big passion of mine.



Design

As a child I loved art. I did a little bit of drawing, a little bit of doodling, a little bit of design. So I have a passion for it and I try to put it into practice, like working on my own merchandise, trying to portray what I'm looking for. Not necessarily the final product, because there are people who can do that much better than me, but at least get the image across and try to play with things. So we're in the middle of doing the merchandising for next season and to be involved in that is quite enjoyable, to be honest.



Running

This is a more recent thing. I think I started running more around 2019, just because it's one of the most accessible exercises. I can run on the treadmill, I can run on the track. I take my running shoes everywhere now, I really got into it and got quite competitive, setting personal goals.



Doohan OK

My dad used to have this 'Doohan OK' sticker on the back of his helmet, with a koala sitting on a beach chair and this playful phrase around our last name. It's becoming a bit of a brand now and I like to see it develop. We're doing some merchandise with it, but in the future I'd like to link it to a mental health charity. It's something I don't necessarily have time for at the moment, but I think it's a super-important issue in the modern world, something that's not talked about enough. It is also an issue in F1. I know how difficult and mentally draining our sport is, not just for the drivers, but for everyone involved. It's a difficult environment, and not just because of what we do at work, but the travel, the commitments, the long days, the long hours, and then being away from family and friends - things can spiral quite quickly. Sometimes it's just important to understand that it's OK not to be OK, and to seek help. And if we can do something good in the future with 'Doohan OK' to support people, that'd be really nice.

Sushi

This goes with penne pomodoro. I think I can eat just that alternating between breakfast, lunch and dinner - for the rest of my life, I won't have any problems with that.



Sim racing

Whenever I get home before 8pm I'm likely to jump into my sim. Even though I do a lot of sim work at the factory, it's still something I enjoy as a hobby. So I have a setup at home. But also gaming in general, whether it be Call of Duty or something else – because sometimes you just want to get away from it all after thinking about racing for 12 hours a day, seven days a week. I think that's important too.





Cycling

It's something I've always enjoyed. It helps my physical performance, which helps my mental performance, which ultimately helps my racing. It gives me time to think, to endure the struggle. And I enjoy the struggle, pushing myself through the stress and the pain - because it's a nice mental exercise, pushing yourself through the difficulties. And you feel good afterwards!

Penne Pomodoro

If I go to an Italian restaurant, I'll always have a simple penne pomodoro and I'll be happy. I don't need Bolognese, I don't need meat or shrimp or anything. Good penne, a bit undercooked, a bit hard... So very al dente - that's ideal!



MotoGP

There's this guy in my family who did a bit of MotoGP, although it was called something else back then. I couldn't get away from it! I've had a passion for bikes since I was little and still do. I watch all the races and get up early when the race is in another time zone and I really do watch the Moto3 races because I have a lot of friends in the paddock. It's a passion I'll always have, regardless of the obvious connection through my father. I go to the races sometimes. With the F1 and MotoGP calendars clashing it's a challenge, but I've never missed a round at Mugello since 2017, because that's always on a different weekend to F1. Whenever I've attended a race, I've always chosen to spend the weekend there rather than at home. I enjoy the atmosphere in the paddock - it's very different in the way people interact.

Success stories

I love learning about life experiences – from great athletes and successful individuals There's nothing like a long chat with someone who has a lot of stories to tell. If I had the chance, I'd love to talk to the likes of Warren Buffett, Ayrton Senna or Muhammad Ali. I had the pleasure of knowing Michael Schumacher, an idol of mine – just extraordinary sportsmen who have been through ups and downs. Talking to someone who's been through a lot can be inspiring. We have a guy in the team called David Warren, who made it to the Olympic 800m final. His path then took him through a job at Canon to F1, then Formula E and back to F1. Learning about such life lessons, the wins but also the losses, has always fascinated me.

NOW THAT WAS A CAR No134

WORDS Damien Smith Pictures James Mann









have won his second world championship in this car. Then again, Jenson Button might have been crowned a two-time consecutive champion within its cockpit, given a fairer wind. Such are the fine margins that diverted the McLaren-Mercedes MP4-25 from its status as potentially a great

ewis Hamilton could, and perhaps should,

in large part to a 2010 Formula 1 season that was both deeply competitive and highly unpredictable.

grand prix car to merely a good one, thanks

It all could have been so different. Take a snapshot of that season and we're reminded just how the fates twisted from what might have been. Dip in after the Canadian Grand Prix in June, for example, and McLaren was riding high following back-to-back Hamilton-Button one-twos, the pair looking down on the rest from the top and separated by just three points. But squint closer and you notice just how tight it was. Red Bull's Mark Webber was just a further three points in arrears, Fernando Alonso – adapting nicely to life in Ferrari red – was very much in contention in fourth. And there in fifth was one Sebastian Vettel. Today, were they minded to, any one of the quintet could still make a case why they could have been champion in 2010. Yet it was the one who had the most to make up who finished wearing the crown. A classic F1 season.

MP4-25 was born from what was then a relatively rare McLaren dud (as we know, they became more common in the following decade). From the high drama of Hamilton's last-gasp pass on Timo Glock to steal the 2008 title from under Felipe Massa's tear-streaked nose, the team made a Horlicks of new technical regulations ushered in for 2009. A hefty downforce-slashing aerodynamic re-write changed the shape of F1 cars, most noticeably with lower and wider front wings



NOW THAT WAS A CAR

ICLAREN MP4-25



and higher and narrower rear wings. Then there were the tyres. Finally, for the first time since 1997, slicks were back and the era of the purposely flawed grooved F1 tyres was over. No one would miss them.

But as the incredible Brawn GP story played out, triggered by newly promoted McLaren team principal Martin Whitmarsh altruistically nudging Mercedes towards the new entity born from the ashes of Honda, and inadvertently creating a monster... his own team floundered. The MP4-24, carefully conceived over 18 months in preparation for the new rules, left Hamilton and team-mate Heikki Kovalainen as bit-part players in the wake of Brawn's canny use of a double diffuser, as a surprised and delighted Button went from staring down the barrel of F1 exile to world champion-elect.

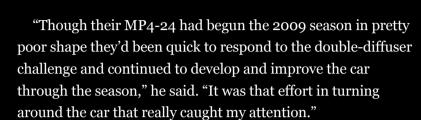
Only by mid-season did McLaren revive, a technical upgrade introduced for the German GP allowing Hamilton to shine at the Hungaroring, where he took the second of so-far eight victories at the circuit near Budapest. That win marked a turnaround, and was also the first for a hybrid F1 car thanks to its new-fangled Kinetic Energy Recovery System – KERS. Such technology would be an F1 game-changer – although not yet – as Hamilton rallied further by winning from pole position in Singapore, then added podiums in Japan and Brazil. At first, it had been a car unworthy of a world champion's defence – but typically of McLaren, it had developed and evolved over the course of the season, and by the end was right where it should have been all along.

That's partly why new champion Button, unsettled and unsure where he stood when Mercedes bought Brawn, made a shock decision to call Martin Whitmarsh. "It was while relaxing on a sun lounger in Dubai, with a chilled drink close by, that I decided I didn't want to make life easy

for myself," he wrote in his autobiography.

The struggle of winning a world championship within a team that didn't have the budget to develop its car through the season had taken its toll. Button decided he needed a new challenge, to fall back in love with racing — and thought taking on F1's fastest driver in 'his own' team ticked all the boxes.

THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME FORMULA 1'S TWO MOST RECENT WORLD CHAMPIONS LINED UP IN THE SAME TEAM



But facing up against Hamilton? Most quietly wondered about Button's sanity.

"I wanted Lewis Hamilton as a team-mate," he insisted.
"You could come up with all sorts of psycho-babble reasons why I wanted to partner him, but it would boil down to one:
I am a sportsman. I feed off competition and I wanted to pit myself against the fastest driver on the grid, a world champion. I wanted to see if I could beat him."

The coup, as Button replaced the underwhelming Kovalainen, created a couple of landmarks: this was the first time Formula 1's two most recent world champions lined up in the same team, and a first since 1968, when Graham Hill joined Jim Clark at Team Lotus, that two British world champions were team-mates. God save the Queen!

Launched at the UK headquarters of sponsor Vodafone, MP4-25 represented a significant step on from its predecessor, largely because of another key change in F1's shifting-sand regulations. The 2010 season would be the first since 1993 not to feature in-race refuelling. The sprint-stop-sprint GP was out, in favour of a return to managing a steadily decreasing fuel load







over a race distance. So McLaren's new model featured a radical aerodynamic overhaul and a substantially larger fuel tank.

"Just about everything has changed on this car," said engineering director Paddy Lowe at the launch. "We also had to get Jenson acclimatised, make sure he was comfortable in the cockpit and work with him to find a brake pad construction he is happy with."

Focus lasered in on the floor to eke out aero benefits, with the new fuel requirements leading to a change in layout at the rear. The car was much longer than

its predecessor (5111mm vs 4892mm), partly because of the additional fuel capacity. And the hybrid element was out for 2010, too. KERS was still officially legal but, since the first attempt to introduce an F1 budget cap was scuppered, the Formula One Teams Association (FOTA) agreed to shelve the technology for now in a bid to curb costs, as three new teams – a revived version of Lotus, HRT and Virgin – joined the fray

"We've also lowered the chassis and bodywork while the removal of KERS has opened up opportunities on internal layout and weight distribution so that it is quite a different aerodynamic treatment to last year," reported Tim Goss, McLaren's chief engineer.

But as F1 froze its interests in hybrid – at least on the surface – other innovations peeked through to find new advantages. This was the year of McLaren's so-called F-duct, an ingenious bit of design that used a small snorkel air scoop mounted in front of the driver to channel air through a duct in the cockpit and towards the rear of the car. Changes in the pressure in the

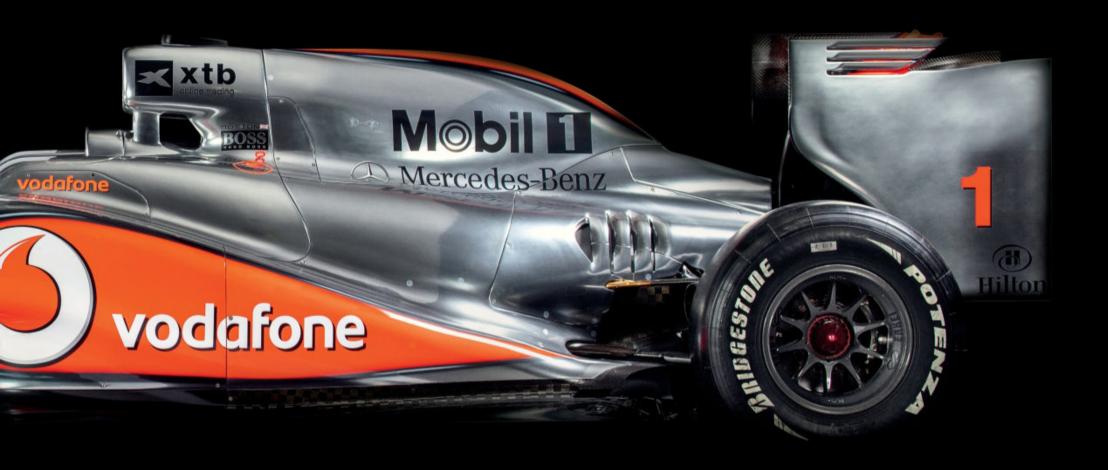


duct, in combination with small slots in the rear wing, caused the wing to enter a stalled state at high speed, reducing aerodynamic drag, and allowing the car as much as an extra 6mph on the straights. Famously, the effect was controlled by the driver covering up a small hole in the cockpit with his left leg. Known internally as RW80, its nickname was either derived from the shape of the air intake – or its positioning beside the F of the Vodafone logo. We prefer the latter suggestion. Naturally, Red Bull complained to the FIA, but MP4-25 was cleared for take-off.

The first race of the new no-refuelling era didn't exactly bode well. Vettel led an uninspiring affair until 16 laps from the finish when a spark plug failure cost him victory and the early championship lead. That left Alonso to make a dream start to his new life at Ferrari, leading Felipe Massa to a Maranello one-two. Hamilton at least passed the troubled Vettel to record a podium third, but Button's McLaren debut had been forgettable. Still, he'd put that firmly behind him in Australia.

This was one of those races that contributed to Button forging his reputation as a tyre whisperer in changing conditions. Although it didn't start well in Albert Park. Alonso pinched him at Turn 1, the McLaren making contact and spinning the Ferrari around. What turned Button's race was his decision to pit early for slicks. He regretted it immediately and almost lost the car first lap out, but then realised his instincts had been spot on. Jenson rose from P19 to P2, then cashed in when Vettel again found himself out of luck. This time, the Red Bull's left-front wheel broke, gifting Button his second

MCLAREN



consecutive Australian GP victory.

Meanwhile, Hamilton was left
raging at his team's strategy in sixth,
after a rear-ending from Webber's
Red Bull. It had been all smiles
when the 2008 world champion first
welcomed his title successor into the
McLaren fold – but Button would
sense an underlying frost bordering
on paranoia as the weeks and
months progressed.

Already, McLaren loved Button and under Whitmarsh's lighter hand (in comparison with Ron Dennis's iron grip), this was largely a happy ship. "I was grizzled enough to know a few tricks when it comes to

ingratiating myself with my new colleagues," wrote Button in his book. "Nothing especially cunning, just spend a bit of time with the guys, make sure there's mutual respect there."

Button's move gained further validation in China, after a poor Malaysian GP. Again in hard-to-read conditions, Jenson made the right calls at the right time, to lead Hamilton to a McLaren one-two. Four races in, the champion had two

THIS WAS THE YEAR OF McLAREN'S SO-CALLED F-DUCT, AN INGENIOUS BIT OF DESIGN THAT USED A SMALL SNORKEL AIR SCOOP MOUNTED IN FRONT OF THE DRIVER



victories and a 10-point lead over the driver who would have been his team-mate had he stuck rather than twisted. Nico Rosberg was making a decent start to life at newly badged Mercedes, although Button's replacement — one Michael Schumacher, back from a three-year retirement wilderness — was taking time to settle in.

Two poles and victories in a week for Webber, in Spain and Monaco, made him the third championship leader of the season, before Red Bull's brewing cauldron boiled over in Turkey. Again, Webber was leading in Istanbul but, following an

order to turn down his engine to save fuel, here came Vettel, barrelling up the inside on the back straight. A clear shift right took him into Webber and left a fuming Adrian Newey with his head in his hands. McLaren picked up the pieces, but Hamilton and Button came inches away from a similar catastrophe.

Lewis had track position this time, but a miscommunication while he was fuel-saving left him vulnerable to an unknowing Button's advances. Jenson swept ahead, only for Lewis to retaliate and take back his lead. Hamilton at first believed his team-mate had ignored a team order not to engage, but that order had never come... This one was on the team, which still had another one-two to celebrate, somewhat uneasily.

Canada was next, with Hamilton again leading Button to a team one-two — in the first two-stop race of 2010. A day of mixed strategies created a welcome sense of uncertainty and provided a template for another major shift in the F1 landscape, when Pirelli replaced Bridgestone in 2011. The Italian supplier agreed to play for the show, even if it didn't exactly reflect well



on its purposely 'rubbish' high-degrading products.

That was all in the future. Here, in June 2010, Hamilton now led the championship narrowly from his team-mate. But Red Bull was coming.

In Valencia, Vettel scored his first win since Malaysia as team-mate Webber survived a terrifying flip after launching off Kovalainen's Lotus. Typically, the Aussie shook it off, then was in chippy mood at Silverstone when Red Bull switched a new wing from his car to Vettel's. "Not bad for a number two driver," he snapped on the radio after a landmark British GP win. Happy days.

At Hockenheim, Ferrari was back on form, but again this was a team riven by tension. Not for the first time that year, Massa was told on his radio, "Fernando is faster than you" as Alonso played politics. Ferrari copped a \$100,000 fine at a time when team orders were officially outlawed – not that it cared.

Hamilton lost his points lead when Webber won in Hungary, but Lewis hit back in style at Spa – despite dropping his car into the gravel at Rivage. Salvaging victory from Webber, on another mixed-conditions day when Alonso was taken out by Rubens Barrichello's Williams and an out-of-control Vettel speared into Button, lifted Hamilton back on top. Was it now between him and the chippy Aussie? It looked that way.

How McLaren's season unravelled from this point is hard to explain. The season just drifted away. Button led two-thirds of the Italian GP, only for Alonso to get the better of the pitstops to send the tifosi into rapture. Hamilton broke his suspension in contact with Massa at the Roggia chicane.

In Singapore, Hamilton again slumped into retirement after a clash with Webber, who held on to his points lead with a podium third. Alonso just beat Vettel, and now the Spaniard

No134

loomed as Webber's biggest threat

Japan was a washout, with qualifying delayed until Sunday morning, and the race was all about Red Bull, Vettel beating Webber. Take a snap of the points at this stage: Webber 220, Alonso 206, Vettel 206, Hamilton 192, Button 189. Suddenly within a couple of races, the McLaren duo were long shots – and the championship was Webber's to lose.

Which is what he did, in the new (and underwhelming) Korean GP. Dropping it on a greasy kerb was probably the moment his best shot at a title slipped away. But here, even Vettel's bad luck returned, an engine blow-up leaving Alonso to win from Hamilton. Fortune had swung again,

now in the Ferrari driver's favour. Two races to run and Alonso held an 11-point advantage over Webber, with Vettel a further seven back.

Nico Hülkenberg threw something new into the heady mix with an opportunistic pole for Williams at Interlagos – still his only one – but the race was all about the Red Bulls, Vettel winning from Webber. Still, Alonso was third, which gave him an eight-point edge over Webber as they headed to Abu Dhabi. Vettel was 15

So, one of the great finales? Well, one of the strangest. Alonso corked up behind a faultless Vitaly Petrov in a Renault for 40 laps was an indictment of the circuit and F1's state of play on overtaking. We

points away from the top.

need DRS! (It followed in 2011.)

Ferrari had been watching Webber

too closely, took its eye off pole-winning Vettel and

spectacularly fumbled its strategy. Alonso

trundled in a disbelieving seventh, losing his cool and his sense of sportsmanship by blaming

Petrov for the slipped title. Hey, the Russian had just being doing his job — and very well, too. Also, when it came to it, Vettel went out and won his first title properly, beating Hamilton through the stops. Lewis also found himself frustrated behind a yellow Renault — that of Robert Kubica. As Vettel crossed the line to win the race, his engineer Guillaume Rocquelin tried to keep his cool. "I need to wait until everyone

said on the radio, doing his best to maintain an even tone. "You just wait, sunshine, you just wait." 'Rocky' counted them in: Hamilton and Button P2 and P3, seberg P4. Kubica P5. Petrov P6. "Du bist Weltmeister!"

has crossed the line, but it's looking good," he

Rosberg P4, Kubica P5, Petrov P6... "Du bist Weltmeister!" he let rip, as his driver burst into tears. Vettel hadn't led the world championship all year — until the only time it counted.

"Let's not forget, you are the youngest world champion in history," exclaimed Rocky. "You are allowed to cry, mate, you are allowed to cry."

As for Hamilton and Button, they were fourth and fifth in the final reckoning, with McLaren runner-up to Red Bull in the constructors'. Somewhere, Ron Dennis sneered. But Button, who usually had a knack of finding the sunny uplands, was all smiles. "I was happy," he claimed. "I'd come into the season wanting to relocate my love of racing, hoping the challenge of partnering Lewis and driving for McLaren would be the catalyst for that, and that's exactly what happened."

Yes, they'd lost – but for the rest of us, what a season.



Santander,



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Wins 5	Suspension Unequal length wishbone, pushrod and bell crank
Pole positions 1	operating inboard torsion bar/damper
Fastest laps 6	Engine Mercedes-Benz FO 108X V8
Podiums 11	Engine capacity 2,398cc
Championship	Power 750bhp @ 18,000rpm
points 454	Gearbox McLaren sequential longitudinal 7-speed semi-automatic
	Brakes Carbon discs
	Tyres Bridgestone

Notable drivers Jenson Button, Lewis Hamilton

Weight 620kg (with driver)

A look at the crucial stats from the last 29 years. It's been a blast...

ISSUES OF F1 AND GP RACING FROM MARCH 1996 TO JANUARY 2025

WORLD CHAMPIONS

during the life of the magazine: Damon Hill,
Jacques Villeneuve, Mika Häkkinen, Michael
Schumacher, Fernando Alonso, Kimi Räikkönen,
Lewis Hamilton, Jenson Button, Sebastian Vettel,
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3 TEAMS HAVE NOT CHANGED THEIR NAMES SINCE THE FIRST ISSUE: FERRARI, WILLIAMS AND MCLAREN







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3 WOMEN

have appeared on the cover of F1/ GP Racing – Georgie Hill (alongside world champion husband Damon), an unknown model (alongside Jenson Button) and Simona de Silvestro

THIRTY-FIVE, THIRTY-TWO AND TWENTY-SEVEN

main appearances on the cover by Lewis Hamilton, Michael Schumacher and Jenson Button respectively.







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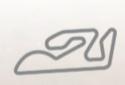
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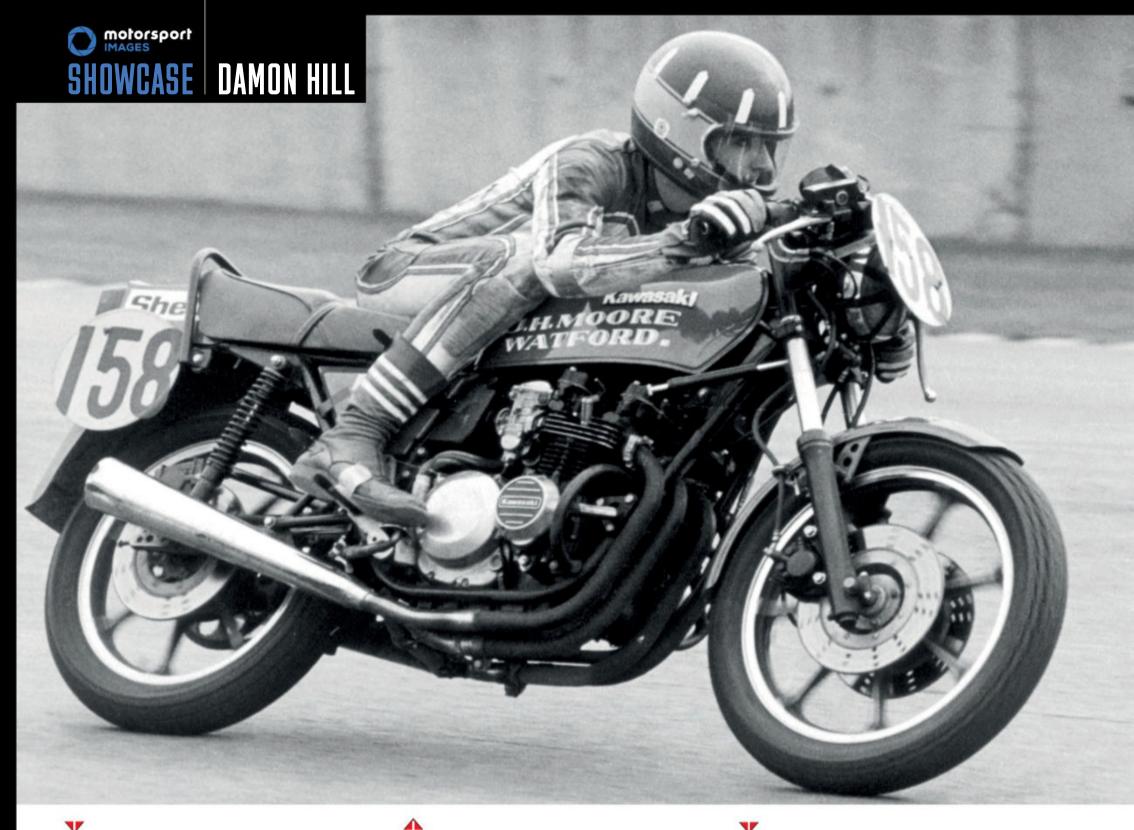
MAGES SHOWCASE DAM IMAGES

As he bows out from Sky F1 commentary duties, it's time to take a look at the career of the driver who won the world championship in 1996, the year this magazine was first published...

Hill joined Williams as a race driver in 1993 alongside Alain Prost. Third in the title race that year, and second in 1994 (controversially) and 1995, he became the first son of an F1 world champion to emulate their father, 28 years after Graham's second and final crown. He clinched the title in Suzuka '96 and his initial celebrations were watched by his nemisis in 1994 and 1995, Michael Schumacher

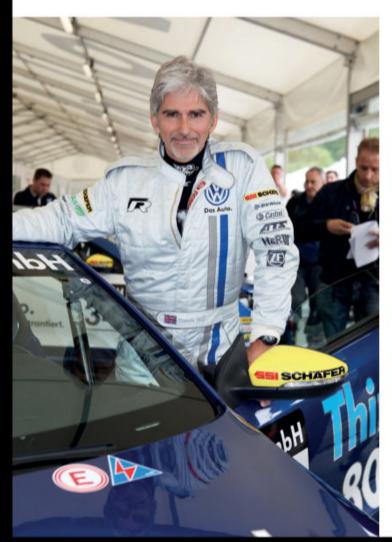






In 2012, 13 years after his last race, Hill came out of retirement for a one-off drive for charity. He and fellow '80s 'Rat Pack' cohorts Mark Blundell, Perry McCarthy, Julian Bailey, Martin Donnelly, plus honorary member David Brabham, raced in a VW Scirocco-R Cup round at Brands Hatch

In a similar path to his father, Damon started his motorsport career on two wheels rather than four. Sporting the same London Rowing Club colours Graham had used, Damon's first outings were in 1980, on a 500cc production Kawasaki, on this particular occasion at Donington Park Hill's career took time to blossom. He progressed to F3 in 1986, but by the end-of-season Macau GP in 1988 had only managed four wins. An aggregate second around the streets of the Portuguese colony was a boost, but it was 1990 before he secured a full-time drive in F3000

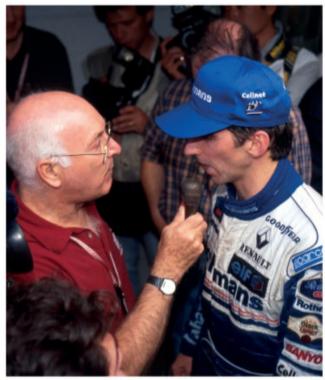




Uncerionously dropped by Williams for 1997, moving to Arrows – a team that had never won a race - was never going to be easy. The highlight of Hill's season as champion was second in Hungary

V Murray Walker's commentary was very emotional when Hill won his world title in 1996. Then in the postrace interview at Suzuka, Damon joked he could hear Murray in his head as he completed the final laps...









years later Damon was on course to right a family wrong by winning his home race, number 2, Hill was given 0 as his race number. something Graham never managed. Leading on His first F1 win, in Hungary, was also the first lap 42, just after a Safety Car period, his Renault $engine\ expired, handing\ victory\ to\ Alain\ Prost$ by a driver racing with that particular digit...

1993, Damon's first full season in F1, started well when in his second race for the team he claimed his first podium, second in the Brazilian GP behind home hero Ayrton Senna. Hill repeated the feat in the very next race, the European GP at Donington Park, again behind Senna





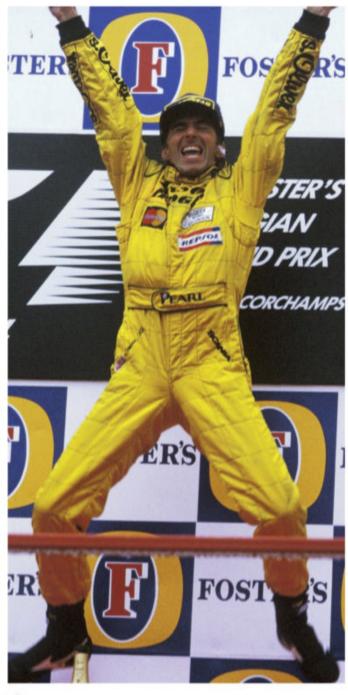
When Graham raced Formula 1 was, sometimes, a full-blown family affair. At Monaco in 1967, watching just before dad took to the track, were Damon, older sister Brigitte (with fingers in her ears), younger sister Samantha (with nanny), and mum Bette acting as timekeeper

Brabham was in its death throes as an F1 team in 1992 when Hill was drafted in from Williams testing duties for round four. He failed to qualify the BT60B for five races but finally made his F1 debut on home soil at the British GP. He would finish 16th and last



Hill was still competing in F3000 in 1991 when Williams took him on as a test driver, in the days when F1 outfits often had separate test teams. His first run was in March 1991 at Silverstone, driving an FW13B the team had raced the previous season. Patrick Head, the team's technical director, was there to keep an eye on him





After a challenging year at Arrows in 1997 and then nearly joining Prost, Hill was signed up to partner Ralf Schumacher at Jordan for 1998. After a slow start to the season the team surprised everyone with a one-two in the Belgian GP at Spa, with Hill claiming his 22nd and final win, and Jordan's first





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Persuaded by his mum Bette to stop racing motorbikes because of the danger, Damon went to the Winfield Racing School in 1983. He began his four-wheeled career as every aspiring driver did back then, in Formula Ford, racing sporadically in 1984, including the end-of-season Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch



After a near miss in 1993, when he retired from the lead, in 1994 Damon finally won the British GP, something his father hadn't achieved in numerous attempts. Handed his trophy by HRH Diana, Princess of Wales, it was the only time Hill stood on Silverstone's F1 podium, although he did finish fifth in his final race there in 1999



When Hill won the French GP in 1992 in the all-conquering Williams FW18, it was his sixth victory in the first nine races of the season. These wins were the bedrock of his championship success, although team-mate Jacques Villeneuve took the title battle to the final round in Japan

At the British GP in 1999, part way through his second season with Jordan, Hill announced his retirement from F1 with Silverstone as his last race. His fans were quick to say goodbye, but after finishing fifth he was persuaded by the team to continue until the end of the season











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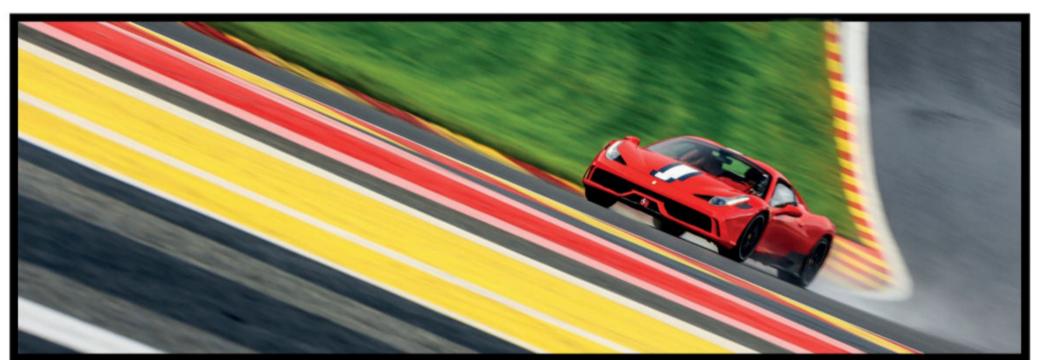
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MAURICE ALTERNATIVE VIEW HAMILTON'S ALTERNATIVE

Should every marshal post now be equipped with a deckchair or two? So long as nobody is caught swearing on camera while trying to erect one...

motorsport

YOU'LL REMEMBER, a while back at Interlagos, Fernando Alonso was pictured sitting trackside in a deckchair? Not for the first time in 2015, his McLaren-Honda had broken down and Fernando was sunning himself while waiting for qualifying to finish.

That memory came back while watching the recent São Paulo Grand Prix in anything but sunny conditions. Alonso was one of several drivers to lose control. Even if he'd been marooned out on track, there's no way Fernando or anyone else would have been seeking a deckchair, even though the FIA has yet to get round to writing a rule forbidding the use of leisure equipment trackside and foul language while trying to erect it in the p***ing rain.

I was actually recalling another incident in similar atrocious conditions when a driver had chosen to stop his car and watch the race rather than continue to take part. Hard to be believe, I know. But that happened during the 1966 Belgian Grand Prix when a rain storm visited the far side of the original 9.3-mile Spa-Francorchamps

At times in Brazil some teams were in the

circuit and the drivers, oblivious to the impending hazard, barrelled into it on the first lap.

One episode in the ensuing chaos would have far-reaching historic proportions when Jackie Stewart landed in a ditch, injured and trapped in the cockpit of his BRM. That was bad enough but the need to get out quickly was multiplied ten times over by fuel from ruptured tanks soaking Stewart's overalls. In the absence of marshals - and, as it would turn out, medical assistance other than a couple of nuns in a nearby first aid tent – it took two other drivers who had spun off, and a spanner borrowed from a spectator, to release Stewart from a potentially lethal situation that doesn't bear thinking about. This terrifying experience would ignite (no pun intended) a safety drive by Stewart that would contribute to the saving of many lives in the future.

Meanwhile... Denny Hulme had been among several drivers to have moments of varying degrees of alarm. The Kiwi had spun at Burnenville, a long, downhill right-hander defined by stout buildings and taken at something close to 150mph that makes no difference if you lose control. (It's worth noting, exceeding track





limits here was self-policing and seemed to work without feeble official interference.)

It had taken Hulme a minute or two to get going again, his intention being to coax the damaged car the six miles or so back to the pits and save himself a long walk. On the circuit's return leg, Hulme spotted those still running going hell for leather on their second lap on the This was in the days of a tyre war between Firestone and Goodyear, the latter having the upper hand thanks to Hulme and his boss, Jack Brabham, doing the business. In fact, for this race, Brabham had made a late switch on the grid to a so-called 'rain tyre'. In truth, you couldn't tell the difference since slicks had yet to come into play and all tyres had grooves which appeared to

After a late tyre change on the grid for the 1967 Canadian GP, Jack Brabham used his 'wets' in both wet and drying conditions

have much the same pattern and depth. There had been periods during the Canadian race when the racing line had dried, but this wasn't a problem for Brabham on his 'wets' as he pressed on with no reduction in pace and won with ease.

These days, the use of different tyres has become confusing to the point of appearing ridiculous. Why did Pirelli haul a load of full wets all to Brazil and, with just two brief exceptions, no one ran them in a race that appeared to be crying out for the blue-walled rubber?

Instead of fussing about political correctness

THESE DAYS, THE USE OF DIFFERENT TYRES HAS BECOME CONFUSING TO THE POINT OF APPEARING RIDICULOUS

far side of the valley. Not wishing to get in the way – and fearing for his and everybody's well-being as the rain hit the flat-out approach to Blanchimont – he parked his Brabham-Climax on the verge and clambered up the bank to safety. Fair enough. But here's the bit that tickled me (as described by the laconic New Zealander):

"The interesting thing was that, while I was out of the car and up the bank, the Climax four [cylinder] was just idling quietly by the side of the road without any problem. Those Climax engines were amazing like that. After they'd all gone by at what seemed like a million miles an hour, I just got back in the car and carried on. But I think that race put me off motor racing in the rain for the rest of my life."

But not enough to prevent Hulme from coping with tricky conditions at Mosport Park the following year when he finished second in the Canadian Grand Prix and went on to win the world championship. Hulme had led for most of the way in Canada but lost ground when forced to stop and change – not tyres, but steamed-up goggles. Even if Hulme had wanted to, a tyre change would have been measured in minutes rather than seconds and, in reality, there wasn't much of a tyre choice.



The marshals had a busy time in Brazil (above) with not a deckchair in sight. Wet tyres (below) only made fleeting appearances in the race



and being seen to be doing the right thing, why is the FIA not addressing the potentially lethal problem of drivers ignoring the safest tyre and taking risks on marginally suited inters? How can it be right that the world is watching the cream of F1 society tiptoeing around in the hope of a red flag — and inevitably getting one because, no prizes for guessing, someone has spun off at best, or crashed heavily at worst? How daft is that?

You may as well ask drivers if they wouldn't mind parking up for a bit on the grass and stretching their legs. But absolutely, definitely and positively no swearing if there's not a deckchair at the nearest marshals' post or the engine is no longer running when they return.

COME WITH ME

Senna, De Angelis, Mansell, Andretti... Kenny Szymanski worked with them all as Lotus's 'tyre guy' - while making sure his day job as an American Airlines steward got him to the track on time...

WORDS DAMIEN SMITH PICTURES MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Nearly 40 years on, it remains among the great Formula 1 images. The John Player Special Lotus, captured in moody black and white from behind, is rolling to a standstill in a drenched collecting area as bedraggled onlookers peer through a wire fence. The driver has already thrown off his belts, his left hand cupped in glory as the chap he's turning towards, in thick-framed Peter Sellers specs and flat cap, welcomes him with arms spread as wide as his ecstatic smile. It's a sopping Estoril in 1985, Ayrton Senna has just logged one of the great wet-weather drives – and he's now a grand prix winner. No wonder Peter Warr, who hasn't relished this feeling for three years, is letting rip.

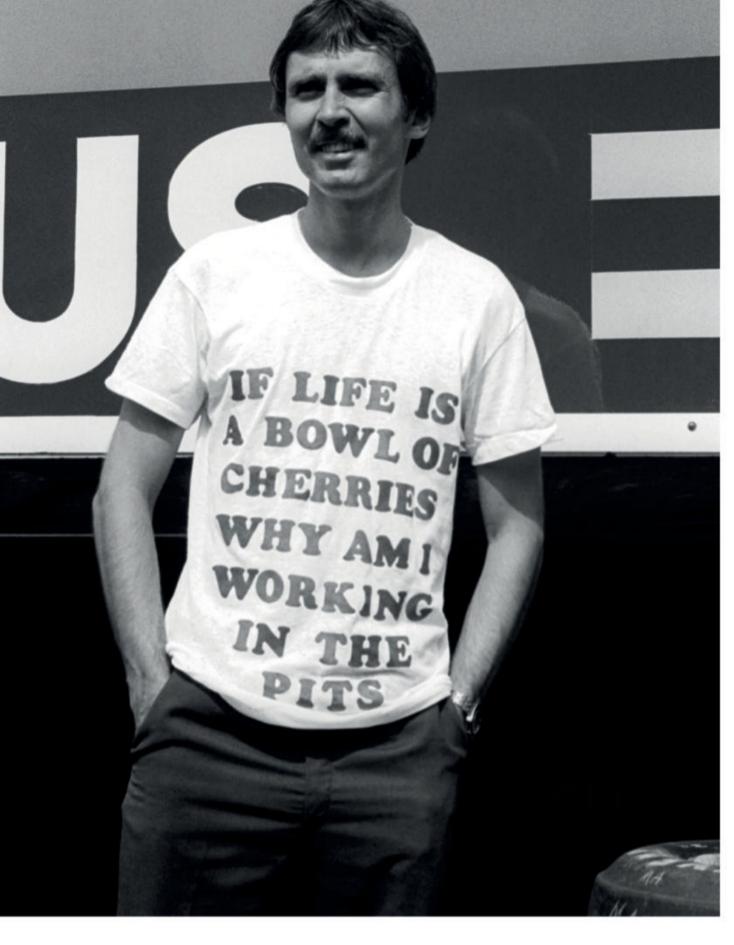
But what completes our man Steven Tee's masterful work is the fella just above Senna's left-front wheel: no coat, Goodyear cap, joy spread all over his face – and caught midpogo, about six inches off the ground with arms, somewhat amusingly, straight by his sides. That's Kenny Szymanski, Lotus's long-serving 'tyre guy', dedicated F1 enthusiast and one of the sweariest men in motor sport (which is saying something).

"Well, I still haven't come down," says Kenny today, "I'm still up in the air. We were all soaking wet because it was pissing like a cow on a flat rock. A great moment. My friend Clive [Hicks] is beside me, but he's being blocked by some punter – which pisses him off to this day. Then there's Peter Warr with outstretched arms. A wonderful day. I'm so glad that was Ayrton's first win and not Monaco in 1984 with the Tolemaniacs..."

We've caught Kenny, after a fair degree of faff with modern-day means of communication, at some godawful hour in his California hotel room. But that's how he likes it, because he has an appointment on the first tee at "the crack of sparrows".







Although still a flight attendant, Szymanski managed to do every race in 1979. At Zolder he wore one of his own t-shirt creations...

Before that I never knew F1 existed. As for my family they didn't know fuck all about it.

"So then I got a job with American Airlines."

Kenny was what today we call a flight attendant

– but in his slightly less varnished words, "a

ball-bearing stewardess on the dolly-trolly".

"I was over in Switzerland on a hiking tour and decided to pop down to Monaco to have a look at what was going on there. This was 1976. When I saw it I said, 'This is great.' So I started chatting up people, like we do. F1 motorhomers Mike and Anne Murphy were looking after Lotus. Mike was loading chairs in the paddock and as I always do, if you see something needs doing, dive in. I said, 'Hey, can I give you a hand?' The rest is history!

"Once I started gabbing he introduced me to Bob Dance" – Lotus's legendary mechanic – "who took a chance on me." To cut to the chase, back at Monaco in 1978 Kenny pitched in as a Lotus 'gofer'. "I told Bob Dance, I'm tired of sneaking into pits, taking pictures and doing fuck all. I really like this sport and I want to make a contribution. I was skipping around, doing races when I could, then in 1979 I did every one."

So did you give up the AA job? "Fuck, no! I was doing both. I was scheduling the races around my flying. They can put anyone in my boots to do the stewardess job, but doing the tyres with Clive Hicks, that was a different story."

Talk to Kenny and you quickly realise why Mario Andretti, world champion in 1978, quickly took to the new guy. They remain firm friends to

Now we've got him, let's find out more about one of F1's most random life stories and an off-the-wall eccentric who built happy friendships with Mario, Elio, Nigel, Nelson, Ayrton and many more during his free-wheeling, hard-grafting, years in the grand prix paddock.

PREPARE FOR TAKE-OFF

How it began is like something straight out of Kerouac or *Catcher in the Rye*. "I grew up in Wisconsin, so I'm a Cheesehead – a [Green Bay] Packers fan," says Kenny as he explains how the racing bug bit from nowhere. "A grandparent brought a programme back from the 1960 Indy 500, I looked at it and said 'this is great.' That garnered up my interest." Speaking of Garner... "Then the movie *Grand Prix* came out and I went to see it six times. Now I was hooked on F1.

The aftermath of that famous picture at Estoril as Szymanski moves away and lets the Lotus mechanics congratulate Senna on the win





Szymanski catches up with Mario Andretti at the US GP in Austin in 2013. The pair bonded in 1978 and are still friends to this day

this day. "He liked the fact I worked hard. And being a Yank, that helped a little bit... And he knew my enthusiasm was there, and he always enjoyed that." Besides collecting tyres from Goodyear, Kenny got his hands dirty however he could and eventually worked pitstops once tyre changes became a thing. "Mario introduced tyre

Kenny would always muck in and do whatever was needed. Here, during preparations for the 1979 US GP, he's the man behind the 'wheel' stagger to F1, which he used at Indy. He applied that to a left-hand down or right-hand down course in F1 and had us checking the staggers and matching up tyres. That really was a challenge."

AIRS AND GRACES

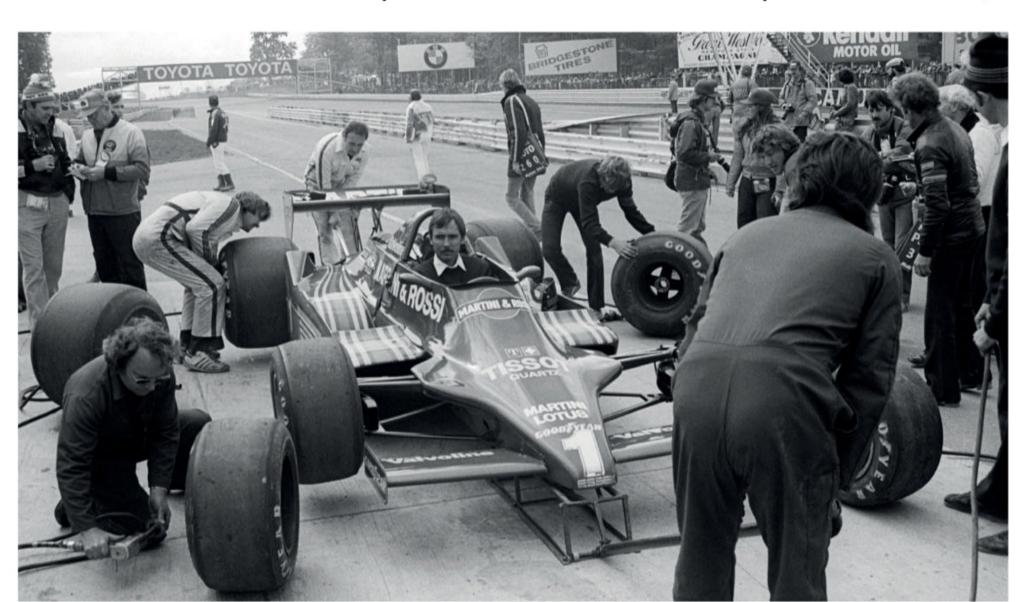
Szymanski lived this crazy dual life on the airlines and in F1 for the next 10 years. What was it about racing that appealed? "Just the competition. Plus the fact there are no excuses:

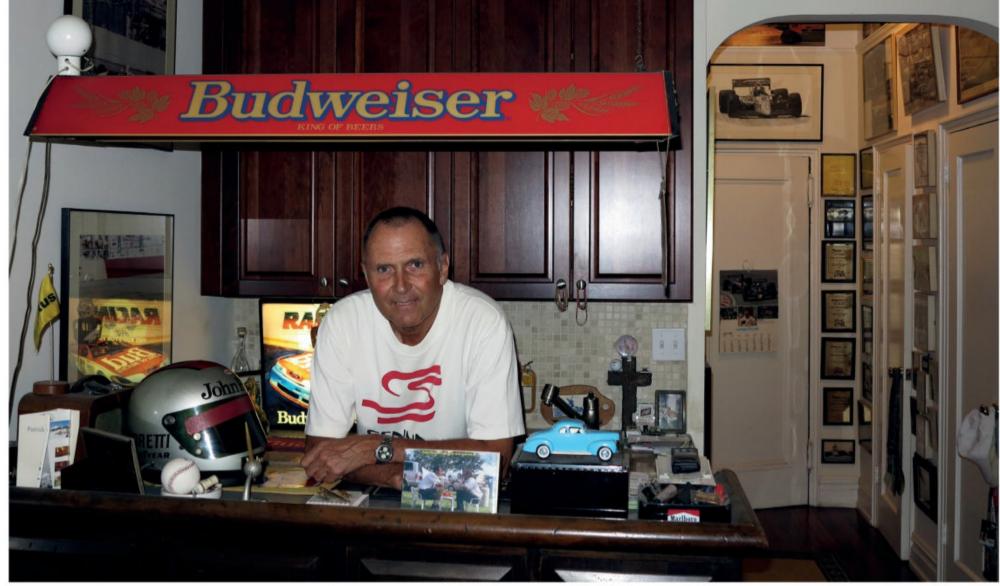
you do it now and you do it right. It's not like everyday life where everybody mollycoddles everyone and makes excuses. You have no choice, the clock is ticking and they are going to start without you. Although I remember in a restroom in Atlanta, where I went to see a NASCAR race, who's stood in the queue for the gents but Richard Petty? I said 'Richard Petty, why don't you cut in front of us?' He said, 'Ah no, don't worry about it mate, they won't leave without me.' Stupid story, sorry."

Beyond Andretti, Kenny forged friendships with all the drivers at Lotus in the 1980s. He describes Nigel Mansell as "great" but was much closer to Elio de Angelis, who stayed with the team for five years before his fateful move to Brabham in 1986 – and his senseless death in a testing accident at Paul Ricard.

"Elio and I were like brothers," says Kenny. "He got his first win in 1982 in Austria. With each lap as they ticked them down I wrote the letters C-I-A-O one by one on the pitboard: CIAO ELIO, P1. It was on the front page of a Roman newspaper. We were trying to get around Alain Prost in the Renault and the Guvnor" - Colin Chapman – "asked, 'How many more laps have we got to go?' I said, 'Four, Guvnor – don't worry, that Renault isn't going to last.' He turns around, looks at me and says, 'Yeah, but that's our engine next year.' I said, 'That's next year, Guvnor, this is today and we need that win.' There's a good picture of him patting me on the back on the pitwall. The finish with Keke was so close," – just 0.05s separated the Lotus from Rosberg's fast-closing Williams. "A great day."

And Chapman: what was he like? "He was





Kenny in 2012 at his 85th Street Museum, which doubles as his New York apartment, with some of his treasured memorabilia (above and right)

great, I enjoyed the Guvnor. At my first race we wrote 'Set 13' on one of the tyres and Colin saw that and said, 'No, no, no, no, no! We don't write 13 on the signal board or on the tyres. Please chaps.' But he knew we were new. In Spain in 1978 he threw his hat in the air when we won, as he always did, and I caught it. I loved the whole family. Jane, one of the daughters, I always called her JPS – Jane's Pretty Special."

MUSEUM PEACE

As for Senna, Kenny cherishes the memories of the great Brazilian's three years at Lotus. He saw a lighter, humorous side the public rarely glimpsed. "Ayrton was 100 per cent serious, he gave you 100% effort. But he'd walk in in the morning, come over, smack you with a fist on the shoulder and say, 'How's my fucking American friend today?' You'd raise your fist and he'd say, 'Uh, uh – don't touch the driver!'"

Senna was also one of a number who paid a visit to what Kenny calls "the 85th Street Museum" – his apartment in New York, which is filled with memorabilia collected from his years in F1. "It was in 1986 after the Canadian GP in Montreal," Kenny recalls. "We were at a dinner with his sponsor Nacional, right near where I live. We finished the dinner and I said, 'Ayrton, you have to come to the 85th Street Museum



and see it.' His manager Armando said, 'Oh no, Kenny, we'll come next time.' But Ayrton being Ayrton, he said: 'We'll do it now.' So they came to the museum. The first thing he did was look at the right-front tyre from Portugal 1985, which I have in my flat signed by him. He looked at the [wet-tread] blocks which of course were worn because they'd done a GP, they were rounded off a little bit. But they were almost pristine."

He lists others who visited the museum and signed his front door: Mario, of course, Jeff Andretti, Hazel Chapman, Johnny Dumfries ("the Dummy"), Jackie Stewart. Then there's Nelson Piquet, whom Kenny befriended long before his ill-starred spell at Lotus. "He liked Clive and myself and we became big mates. We'd pass out rude cards to the drivers on their birthdays. So Nelson, when he came to New York, he rang and came by the Museum. I'll never forget it: he needed some carburettors for one of his boats so

Szymanski values the three years he worked with Ayrton Senna at Lotus and the Brazilian was one of many to visit his museum



I took him on the subway up to a garage in the Bronx. When he signed the door, he signed 'To Kenny, FACK YOU'. I said, 'If you are going to put graffiti on my door, at least spell the fucking word 'fuck' right!' He loved that."

When a change of management in 1988 spelt the end of Kenny's time at Lotus, that might well have been that. "10 years was good, I was happy with that," he says. "We'd made our contribution." But more than a decade later, an old friend called and Szymanski found himself back in the F1 paddock – for an experience he'll never forget.

Kenny had worked closely with Nigel Stepney, perhaps F1's most (in)famous chief mechanic, at Lotus. In fact, they worked the same tyre in

"AT MY FIRST RACE WE WROTE 'SET 13' ON ONE OF THE TYRES AND COLIN SAW THAT AND SAID, 'NO, NO, NO!"







Working in IndyCar in 2017 (above). Kenny still visits the F1 paddock and at this year's US GP was bedecked in a Camel Team Lotus shirt (left)



With McLaren's Steve Hallam at the 2003 US GP at Indianapolis when Szymanski got to wear the red of Ferrari and work with Michael Schumacher

pitstops, with Stepney on the gun. "Every time when he walked in, Nigel at the start of a day would never say good morning – he'd say, 'Get that fucking wheel on, Yank!' It made me laugh every time. Nigel was a real tactician. They called him The Punisher. A good worker and he expected the same from you."

MEETING MICHAEL

By 2001, and in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Stepney was a key cog within Ferrari – and he called Kenny needing a hand for the US GP at Indianapolis. "I said, 'Stop, Nigel: are you asking me if I wanna wear that famous red shirt?' He said yeah. I said, 'How much do I have to pay you?' Then I helped them out on odd races, when Michael [Schumacher] and Rubens [Barrichello] were there. That was quite a treat. We went to Japan, Italy, Indy of course. To this day, I think about that experience. It was wonderful."

So, Schumacher. Speak to anyone who worked with the seven-time world champion and they're quick to say how great he was on a one-to-one level. Kenny is no different. "He was very, very interesting, I'll tell you. We were having a team dinner at Indianapolis at that first grand prix I worked with them in 2001 and he and [his wife] Corinna were sitting behind me. Michael tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Tell me, how is it you are here? We never have people coming in for just a one-off to help out.' I explained to him that I'd changed the left-front with Nigel at Lotus for Ayrton, and they needed a hand. It was a very special moment with Michael that I never forget. It's not often someone of that stature will ask you a question about you."

Today, Kenny loves to drop back in on F1 at the Austin grand prix and this year spent some time with the crew at Alpine. "The tyre guy was so happy to bring us into the tyre department and show us around. It was really good to see so particular, track limits and all this bullshit.

I know the drivers have agreed to it and that's their own call – but let 'em race, for fuck's sakes."

Kenny's enjoying retirement today, but only stopped 'doing the tyres' last year when he was working for Ganassi in the American IMSA sports car series. Ganassi mainstay and six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon was a recent

stopped 'doing the tyres' last year when he was working for Ganassi in the American IMSA sports car series. Ganassi mainstay and six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon was a recent visitor to the Museum, the latest to sign the famous door. "Those 10 years with Lotus were the best of my life, hands down," says Kenny, who's itching to get down to that first tee. "Then to top it off, to work for Ferrari... I'll never forget coming out of the shower and one of my room-mates, a truckie, had the red shirt laying on the bed for me. I said, 'Praise Jesus! This is something special.' Needless to say I've still got it." We know where it'll be.

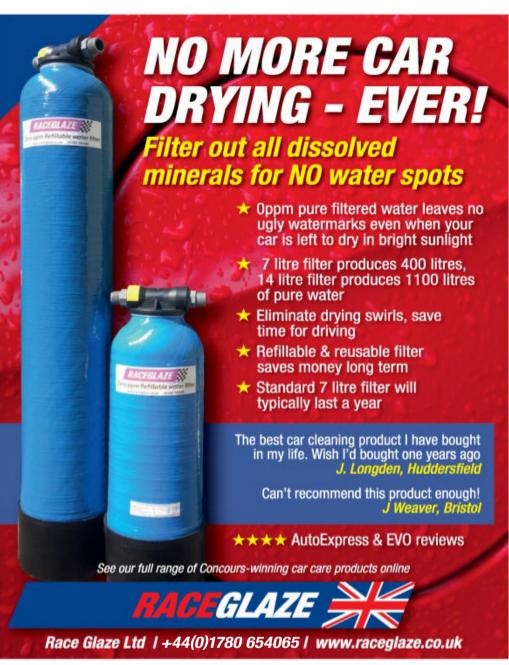
inside of the new F1." So what did he think? "I

liked it when we only had 20 guys. It's become

"Racing has been wonderful, it's made my life," says Kenny as he signs off. From walking the aisles of 747s to striding the paddocks wheeling a stack of tyres, what a life it's been. It wouldn't happen now.

"I SAID, 'STOP, NIGEL: ARE YOU ASKING ME IF I WANNA WEAR THAT FAMOUS RED SHIRT?' HE SAID YEAH. I SAID, 'HOW MUCH DO I HAVE TO PAY YOU?'"







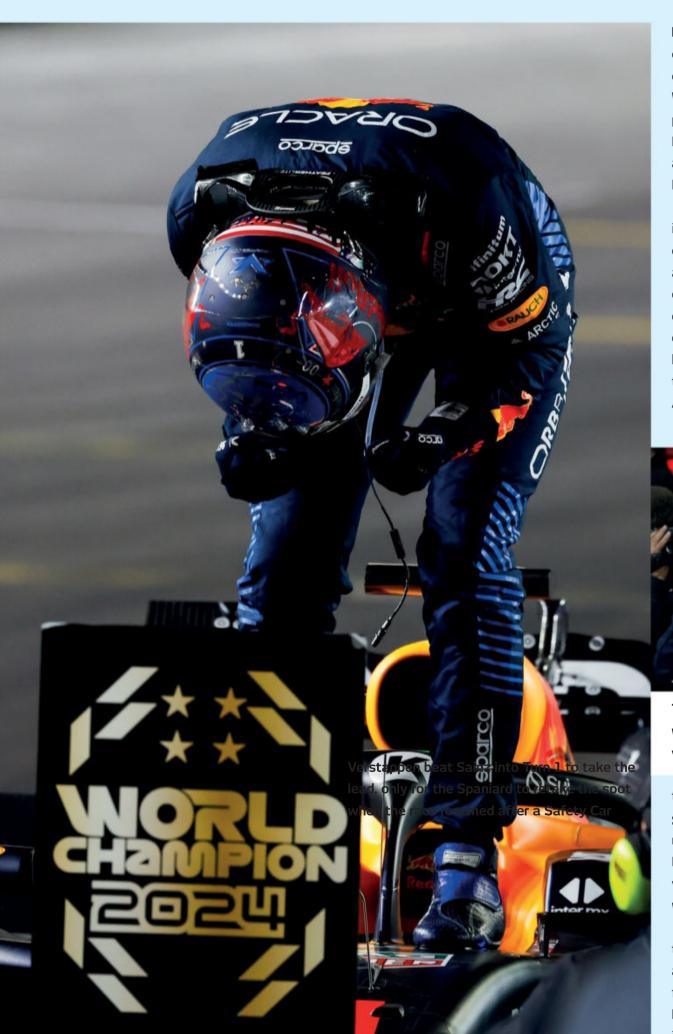




F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 22

RAGE DEBRIEF THE LAS VEGAS GP IN 5 KEY MOMENTS REPORT BY JAMES ROBERTS

Verstappen follows in the wheeltracks of Piquet and Rosberg



For all the ostentation and 'nouveau F1' status of the Las Vegas Grand Prix, the final classification offered a neat fragment of historical symmetry. When Max Verstappen crossed the line in fifth place, he mirrored the achievements of Nelson Piquet (his partner's father) and Keke Rosberg, who also secured their respective championship titles in Las Vegas in 1981 and '82 with fifth-place finishes.

In a city renowned for its sporting showdowns, it was perhaps fitting that Max secured the title on the famous Strip. All he needed to do was finish ahead of his closest rival, Lando Norris - and he delivered, finishing one place ahead of the McLaren driver. After climbing from his RB20, Verstappen was quickly congratulated by his fellow drivers, including his friend Lando, before holding four fingers aloft to signify his place alongside Sebastian Vettel and Alain Prost as a four-time F1 world champion.

Red Bull team boss Christian Horner was quick

Title number four (above and left) was secured with relative ease for Verstappen despite a very unpromising start to the weekend

to hail his charge as one of the sport's "all-time greats" while acknowledging a tough season that marked their "hardest" championship campaign yet. Despite a long winless streak, Verstappen's eight victories up to Las Vegas are more than double what any other driver has managed.

"Last year I had a dominant car, but I always felt that not everyone appreciated what we achieved as a team. But I'm also proud of this season, because for 70 per cent of it, we didn't have the fastest car but still extended our lead," Verstappen said, before imbibing another can of the race sponsor's beer.

"At one point, it seemed like we were a little bit lost and at times [Lando] made it very difficult for me. We simply didn't have an answer in many races where they were clearly faster. To win a championship, you need to be consistent. And that's what we did. But I'm sure we'll have many more battles to come."

The closest Norris got to Verstappen all weekend was at the start of the race. Lining up together on the third row, the McLaren ran side-by-side with the Red Bull through the opening sequence of corners, but the papaya-liveried machine soon fell away. The MCL38 doesn't favour low-drag, low-grip conditions and, like many others, struggled with tyre warm-up and was susceptible to front graining due to the combination of cold nocturnal temperatures in the Nevada desert and the slippery track surface.

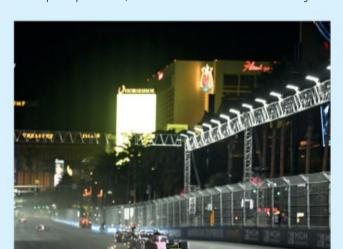
It hadn't looked promising for Red Bull in the run-up, either. Under the cost-cap constraints, a bespoke low-drag rear wing was deemed an unnecessary extravagance for the two high-speed tracks of Vegas and Monza. Improvisation ruled the day as the mechanics removed the Gurney flaps and shaved bits of carbonfibre off with hand tools. While Max would have liked to get the title over the line with a race win, he had no answer to the pace of George Russell's winning Mercedes - or, indeed, the sister car of Lewis Hamilton and the two Ferraris, both of which passed him during the course of the race. Fifth was the best Max could achieve, while team-mate Sergio Pérez finished tenth after qualifying 16th – not a great haul for the constructors' championship.

Norris had a lonely race in sixth, especially after his team-mate Oscar Piastri had to serve a five-

second penalty for being out of position in his grid slot at the start. On the penultimate lap, Norris pitted for soft Pirellis to claim the bonus point for fastest lap – while the drivers' title was out of his reach, the constructors' was still open. While Ferrari reduced McLaren's lead to 12 points, it could have been worse if the Mercedes hadn't been so fast...

Mercedes at full tilt

While the McLaren MCL38 faltered on the Las Vegas course, in contrast the Mercedes W15 came alive. George Russell was virtually uncatchable and, from pole position, he claimed his second victory of



the year. The only driver who might have stopped him was his team-mate Lewis Hamilton – but two separate mistakes in qualifying meant the seventime champion started tenth on the grid.

Given the nature of the Strip street circuit, where any error could have led to a Safety Car, Russell spent much of the race wondering what freak event might derail his victory celebrations.

"This season, every time we've had pace we've been hit with so many curveballs," said a champagne-soaked Russell. "Last race in Brazil – red flag. Montréal, starting from pole – rain, dry, rain. Belgium – disqualified. I was thinking when were we going to get some fortune? So the whole race I was waiting for something to happen, but it never came."

Nevertheless George continued to fret about potential risks, changing out of his wet suit and donning a thick jacket to insulate himself against the evening chill. Last year, of course, he arrived at the round after Vegas feeling ill and out of sorts.

The W15 thrived in the near-icy conditions of Las Vegas, as it had done earlier in the year at the cold tracks of Silverstone and Spa. Its ability to generate tyre temperature quickly was evident in qualifying, where Russell led the field by three tenths in the first sector. But it wasn't just the cooler temperatures that favoured the Mercedes.

The efficiency of the W15's low-drag rear wing means it delivers respectable levels of downforce. This protected the rear tyres during the race and improved traction out of the low-speed turns.

Additionally, the relative absence of bumps on the





RACE DEBRIEF

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 22

road surface allowed the team to run at a low ride height to enhance performance.

Hamilton likened his race to his days karting at Rye House, as he charged through the field, overtaking the opposition as if they were standing still. He was even hunting down Russell in the final stages and suggested that the win would have been "a breeze" if he hadn't made his errors in Q3.

Red mist at Ferrari

In the gap between Brazil and Las Vegas, two surprising developments unfolded. The first was the Grand Prix Drivers' Association issuing its first public statement in eight years (see p18). In it, the GPDA expressed frustration with the FIA's leadership style, criticising the "tone and language" of its president, while dismissing what they considered trivial instructions regarding "jewellery and underpants."

Secondly, the FIA parted ways with race director Niels Wittich. In his place came Rui Marques, whose first job was to act swiftly on Friday night after practice, adding extra paint to the Las Vegas track to improve the demarcation of the pitlane entry.

However, some were surprised there was no sanction for Carlos Sainz during the race itself, when he was directed by the pitwall to abort his stop on lap 28. Given the final corner is flat out, the sight of a car re-entering the track at this point left some observers unimpressed.

Sainz was also nonplussed, especially when it was explained to him that the reason for the late call was simple: the crew wasn't ready. Team-mate Charles Leclerc also had reasons to be cheerless afterwards; having passed Sainz into Turn 1 at the start, he felt he mismanaged his tyres in the first stint and, as he began to struggle for pace, he let Sainz through. Leclerc emerged from the second pitstop phase marginally ahead but Sainz then disobeyed an order not to pass him.

Carlos then remained ahead to take the final podium slot. Leclerc, on his cool-down lap, gave vent to his frustrations in a manner likely to give the highly sensitive FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem an attack of the vapours.

"Yeah, I did my job, but being nice fucks me over all the fucking time," he ranted at race engineer Bryan Bozzi. "All the fucking time. It's not even being nice, it's just being respectful. I know I need to shut up, but at one point it's always the same, so... oh my fucking God." Bozzi attempted to impress upon his driver that picking up spent rubber was of greater

importance on this lap than emoting, but received further fulmination in response.

"I asked the team two or three times to box me, to get me out of the way, and get me a new set of hards to make sure that I wasn't losing a lot of race time by having to let Charles by," explained Sainz. "For some reason we didn't box and I ended up having to let Charles by a lap later than was planned and lost a lot of race time.

"By the time I was going to box, then we didn't... I guess he's not happy, but I'm also not happy with the way things were handled at the time. So I think no one's happy today."

While the exact cause of Leclerc's frustration remains unclear - he was rather less talkative after the race - it likely stemmed from his personal battle to maximise his points against Norris for second place in the drivers' standings.

A late second stop for Nico Hülkenberg was crucial to allow the Haas driver to score



All go in the money battle

While the constructors' championship is generally less exciting for fans than the race for the drivers' title, for the teams it's a big deal because points make prize money. Events in Vegas not only upped the ante at the front, they placed fresh focus on the battle for sixth.

Alpine's post-Austin surge, including a remarkable double podium in Brazil, looked to be continuing as Pierre Gasly qualified fifth. But after that impressive effort, frustration followed when he suffered a power unit failure just 15 laps into the race - perhaps vindicating the team's decision to ditch its parent company's engine supply and switch to Mercedes customer units from 2026. Gasly, who had run wide with Carlos Sainz at Turn 1, was still running in the points when he reported a loss of power. Moments later, an ominous plume of blue smoke billowed from the back of his A524.

"It's a very tough one to take because we had such a high [in qualifying] yesterday," said Gasly.



"I think we were on for a good fight with Yuki [Tsunoda] for best of the rest, to fight for some important points for the championship. It's just very disappointing from one day to another to have this happen."

Alpine's misfortunes deepened when Esteban Ocon was embroiled in what amounted to a selfinflicted drive-through penalty when he pitted to discover his team wasn't ready to service him.

Meanwhile, Nico Hülkenberg secured eighth place for Haas by maximising the possibilities of a race strategy which called for a relatively late second stop, giving him a tyre offset. Finishing ahead of Tsunoda's RB enabled Haas to edge back ahead of Alpine by a single point (50 to 49), with RB just three points further behind on 46.

> Williams rues another costly repair bill

Pre-Vegas, Sergio Pérez was leading the unofficial world championship for most crash damage inflicted during a season. But he could have a

Both sides of the Ferrari garage were unhappy, Leclerc with Sainz, and Sainz with the team over his 'non' stop

late challenger in the form of Franco Colapinto coincidentally one of the drivers being linked to Checo's at-threat Red Bull seat.

Late in Q2, Colapinto misjudged Turns 15 and 16, tapping the inside wall and snapping a steering arm - which meant a hard slam into the concrete barriers on the outside. The team later revealed the impact registered 50G and the Argentine driver underwent medical checks. He was subsequently cleared to race, despite the heavy clout with the wall.

This was the team's fifth major shunt in three races, stretching Williams' spare parts inventory to its limit. After a fortnight of relentless work at the factory, it was a testament to the stamina of the mechanics, given the scheduling of the Las Vegas race and the timing of this long campaign.

Unfortunately, there was little reward. Colapinto started from the pitlane and finished 14th, while Alex Albon suffered his third successive retirement - this time due to a power-unit cooling issue.



RESULTS ROUND 22

LAS VEGAS STRIP CIRCUIT / 23.11.24 / 50 LAPS



lst	George Russell Mercedes	1h22m05.969s
2nd	Lewis Hamilton Mercedes	+7.313s
3rd	Carlos Sainz Ferrari	+11.906s
4th	Charles Leclerc Ferrari	+14.283s
5th	Max Verstappen Red Bull	+16.582s
6th	Lando Norris McLaren	+43.385s
7th	Oscar Piastri McLaren	+51.365s
8th	Nico Hülkenberg Haas	+59.808s
9th	Yuki Tsunoda RB	+62.808s
10th	Sergio Pérez Red Bull	+63.114s
11th	Fernando Alonso Aston Marti	n +69.195s
12th	Kevin Magnussen Haas	+69.803s
13th	Zhou Guanyu Stake	+74.085s
14th	Franco Colapinto Williams	+75.172s
15th	Lance Stroll Aston Martin	+84.102s
16th	Liam Lawson RB	+91.005s
17th	Esteban Ocon Alpine	+1 lap
18th	Valtteri Bottas Stake	+1 lap
Potico	monts	

Retirements

Alex Albon Williams	25 laps/power unit
Pierre Gasly Alpine	15 laps/power unit

Fastest lap

Lando Norris 1m34.876s on lap 50

TYRE COMPOUNDS USED











CLIMATE

AIR TEMP

TRACK TEMP

DRIVERS' STANDINGS

	DITIVEITS STANDINGS				
	1 Verstappen	403pts	11 Tsunoda	30pts	
	2 Norris	340pts	12 Gasly	26pts	
	3 Leclerc	319pts	13 Stroll	24pts	
	4 Piastri	268pts	14 Ocon	23pts	
	5 Sainz	259pts	15 Magnussen	14pts	
	6 Russell	217pts	16 Albon	12pts	
	7 Hamilton	208pts	17 Ricciardo	12pts	
	8 Pérez	152pts	18 Bearman	7pts	
	9 Alonso	62pts	19 Colapinto	5pts	
	10 Hülkenberg	35pts	20 Lawson	2pts	
	O		21 Guanyu	0pts	
١	(II) MOTO	rsport	22 Sargeant	0pts	

23 Bottas

0pts



RAGE DEBRIEF THE QATAR GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 23

IN 5 KEY MOMENTS REPORT BY JAMES ROBERTS



Mirror, mirror on the floor...

Events in the run-up to the Qatar Grand Prix had put the FIA's internal business in the spotlight as veteran steward Tim Mayer and F2 race director Janette Tan became the latest links in a chain of high-profile departures (see p18). As a consequence, the recently installed F1 race director Rui Margues had a busier than usual weekend, with plenty on his plate come race day - and the inevitable scrutiny which followed.

A few moments after the chequered flag brought proceedings to a close, a wag in the Lusail media centre quipped that Qatar had hosted more penalties during the weekend than it had in the 2022 World Cup. The most severe sanction was applied to Lando Norris, though the circumstances surrounding his infraction as well as the perceived harshness of the punishment led to brickbats being aimed in the officials' direction.

The Qatar GP turned on its head on lap 29 when the right-hand wing mirror fell off Alex Albon's Williams (it's worth mentioning here that Yuki Tsunoda misheard a warning from his engineer and was convinced a "beaver" was on track). The mirror

landed intact, off the racing line, on the start/finish straight. Double-waved yellow flags were deemed appropriate. At the time, Norris was engaged in a close battle for the lead with Max Verstappen and the Dutchman - with the multi-tasking perspicacity of a champion – noticed the McLaren was slightly closer in his rear-view mirrors on lap 30. Over team radio, he queried if Norris had slowed as required.

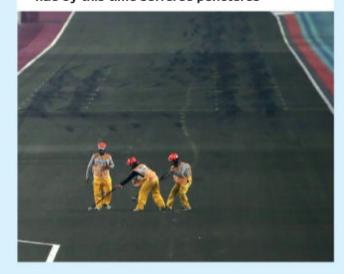
"I know if I didn't, I'd be punished straight away," a forthright Verstappen would say later. Norris had indeed not seen the flags or lifted off for them on that lap, although Formula One Management's broadcast team then added confusion by accidentally showing a replay of in-car footage from a different lap where he did appear to lift.

While Norris was apologetic for his mistake, he and the team were surprised by the severity of the penalty issued: a 10 second stop/go. The decision took time to come through and, when it did, it dropped Norris to 15th. He recovered to finish 10th, salvaging another point with the fastest lap.

"The penalties were brutal," Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff would say in response to questions over the many sanctions applied this weekend. "Particularly to McLaren."

Naturally there were also questions over whether the Safety Car or a VSC should have been triggered so that the mirror could be removed. A

The debris is eventually cleared during the Safety Car, but Sainz and Hamilton had by this time suffered punctures



VSC was a definite no-no, though - the cars were so spread out by this point that it would still have been unsafe for marshals to go on track. A Safety Car, meanwhile, would have bunched the cars up making it safe for the mirror to be removed, but also interfering with the normal flow of the race at a crucial point, with pitstops looming.

In an 'explainer' issued the following day the FIA defended its approach, stating it was "normal practice" not to deploy a Safety Car for a "small amount of debris, off the racing line." However, the fact that the mirror lay in the track's sole DRS zone complicated matters. Five laps later, Valtteri Bottas moved right to allow himself to be lapped and hit the mirror, breaking it into shards of carbon fibre.

Within another lap, two drivers - Lewis Hamilton and Carlos Sainz – suffered left-front punctures, forcing the deployment of the Safety Car. Adding to the impression of disarray, its lights promptly failed.

While the obvious conclusion to draw is that the punctures were caused by debris, as this edition of GP Racing closed for press Pirelli was still investigating. There were other possible explanations in which the presence of debris is entirely coincidental: car development and cooler ambients had made for laptimes 3s faster than last year on average, while the DRS zone had been shortened, reducing the opportunities to overtake. As a result, all teams were trying to extend the life of their first tyre sets to lock in a one-stop race, and by this point the heavily stressed front-lefts will have been marginal on wear. Gravel or kerb impacts could also have caused the sudden deflations.

McLaren's misfortune continued, since the timing of the Safety Car scuppered Oscar Piastri, who had pitted the lap before. This dropped him to third, one position behind Ferrari's Charles Leclerc. Piastri had already made a bold move to pass Leclerc earlier in the race but couldn't replicate the feat later on.

After finishing one-two in the sprint the day before - with Norris ignoring the team and lifting out of the final corner to gift the victory to Piastri -McLaren had to put its non-alcoholic sparkling wine go down to the wire in Abu Dhabi.

Verstappen: Russell ain't ever gonna be respectable

When Max Verstappen crossed the line to win in Qatar, his race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase took a sarcastic swipe at another penalty, one Max had picked up the day before. "Karma is a wonderful thing," said GP. "You definitely did not drive unnecessarily slowly today. Great job."

Some four hours after qualifying had ended, the stewards decided to strip Max of pole position and demote him to second place on the grid, behind George Russell. It was a penalty that left Max seething, not only because of the decision, but the manner in which Russell had acted in the stewards' room.

It was another case of the configuration of the Qatar track having an influence on circumstances leading to a penalty. This venue was originally designed for motorcycle racing and its fast, flowing layout, with few big 'traction events', makes it difficult to get heat into the rear tyres and balance the car. As such there were varying approaches to

preparing the tyres during qualifying: Verstappen was doing two slow 'prep laps' while Russell was doing a faster single one when the Mercedes encountered the Red Bull at Turn 12 and had to take evasive action. The usual tariff for obstruction is a three-place grid drop but this was mitigated down to one because of the circumstances.

Nevertheless the situation led to a heated argument between both drivers and, after the race, Verstappen explained the reasons for his disgruntlement.

"I was quite surprised when sitting there in the stewards' room, what was all going on," said Verstappen. "Honestly, very disappointing, because I think we're all here, we respect each other a lot. I've been in that meeting room many times in my life, in my career with people that I've raced, and I've never seen someone trying to screw someone over that hard. And that for me... I lost all respect."

The perceived injustice, as Max also felt in Brazil, made for a particularly determined drive during the Qatar race, especially on the run down to Turn 1, to claim what he felt was his rightful position ahead of Russell. "I couldn't believe that I got [the penalty] but in a way I'm not surprised anymore in the world





RACE DEBRIEF

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 23

AK AIKWAY

on hysterics from George, who has been quite hysterical this weekend," said Red Bull boss Christian Horner. "But unfortunately I think there was a little bit of gamesmanship going on in that. It was frustrating to get that penalty, but Max was motivated to win this race, and I think it only added to his enthusiasm to get off the line well."

3 Ocon's unexpected swansong

On lap 11 of the Qatar Grand Prix, Haas seemed well on the way to extending its points lead over Alpine in the battle for sixth in the constructors' championship. Kevin Magnussen was running in ninth place, two spots ahead of Alpine's Pierre Gasly – and, based on form in the sprint, the Haas car was reckoned to be the faster of the two over a race distance.

But Gasly was one of the winners in the Safety Car period, benefitting from pitting while the course was neutralised, and then clung on to fifth place grittily, fending off Carlos Sainz's Ferrari despite having to lift-and-coast to save fuel in the final laps. As a result the Enstone-based outfit headed into the Abu Dhabi finale five points clear of Haas, with RB slipping back as neither of its drivers finished in the points.

Alpine and Haas had something in common in that while each had one driver score, their other drivers had a miserable qualifying and then failed to finish. Nico Hülkenberg had an energy-deployment issue and was eliminated in Q1, while Esteban Ocon started last.

"He [Ocon] isn't totally comfortable in the car and we're working with him to understand why," explained team principal Oli Oakes at the time.

But the wheels were turning behind the scenes. Even before Ocon was eliminated at the first corner – knocked into the Williams of Franco Colapinto by Hülkenberg, who arrived with brakes locked – moves were afoot to replace him for the final round.

Ocon is moving to Haas next season and was hoping to get seat time with that team at the post-season test. Alpine is promoting reserve driver Jack Doohan and wanted to get him up to speed in race conditions as soon as possible. Clearly there was a deal to be done, and *GP Racing* understands Esteban was summoned to the office of 'team advisor' Flavio Briatore on race day morning and told he would not be released for the test unless he stepped down.



Hamilton's Mercedes era fizzles out

Another driver struggling with form ahead of a team switch for '25 is Lewis Hamilton. Much like Ocon, the reasons for the discrepancies between Hamilton and his team-mate George Russell remain unclear, but something is undeniably amiss. A seven-time world champion of Hamilton's calibre doesn't typically make errors like jumping the start

or earning a pitlane speeding penalty – both of which he did in Lusail.

Late in the race, a dispirited Hamilton even suggested over the radio that he should "retire the car" while trundling around in 15th and last place. Having been given the go-ahead, though, he changed his mind.

Having qualified four places behind his team-mate (before Russell was promoted by Verstappen's penalty), then incurred a penalty for the jump-start, Hamilton sustained a frontleft puncture at the same time as Carlos Sainz.



VILLAND DI CONTRATTONIO DONO CONTRATTONIO



After the race, Hamilton attributed his poor pace to understeer and suggested it could even have played a part in the tyre deflation.

"With the under balancing, you don't get the wing set properly," said Lewis. "It's happened many times. It's basically not having enough front wing in the car and so it just doesn't turn.

"So I was just understeering massively for a long period of time. And honestly, for me, it felt like that's what led to the tyre failing. Maybe it was debris. I didn't see any debris."

Hamilton finished the race 12th, having managed





The four points Zhou Guanyu gained for a battling eighth were the first the Sauber/Audi team has scored this season

only sixth in the previous day's sprint. In contrast, Russell chased down both McLarens to claim third in the Sprint race, followed by a fourth-place finish from pole position in the main event. Russell was another driver to incur a penalty, receiving a five-second sanction for falling more than ten car lengths behind the Safety Car.

Sauber officially not pointless

The jovial Lusail paddock enjoyed a Formula 1 first: sponsor Qatar Airways set up a barber shop halfway down the strip behind the pits. And a cheeky suggestion was made to rename it Qatar Hairways. The activation neatly coincided with the announcement over the weekend that the Sauber/ Audi team has secured investment from QIA, the sovereign wealth fund of Qatar (see p20)

It was fitting, then, that Sauber finally scored its first points of the year, as China's Zhou Guanyu secured eighth place. An upgrade package introduced in Las Vegas – a new floor which will be the basis of next season's car – was reckoned to be worth three tenths of a second per lap and both cars made it through to Q2.

"It's been a draining season for us, for me and Valtteri [Bottas] and the whole team and this is a relief," said Zhou. "We never expected to have a car to fight for points."

Bottas was ushered off the track by RB's Liam Lawson (who later apologised) at the start and finished 11th.

RESULTS ROUND 23

LUSAIL INTERNATIONALCCIRCUIT 01.12.24 / 57 LAPS



lst	Max Verstappen Red Bull	1h31m05.323s	
2nd	Charles Leclerc Ferrari	+6.031s	
3rd	Oscar Piastri McLaren	+6.819s	
4th	George Russell Mercedes	+14.104s*	
5th	Pierre Gasly Alpine	+16.782s	
6th	Carlos Sainz Ferrari	+17.476s	
7th	Fernando Alonso Aston Martin	+19.867s	
8th	Zhou Guanyu Stake	+25.360s	7
9th	Kevin Magnussen Haas	+32.177s	atety
10th	Lando Norris McLaren	+35.762s	the 5
11th	Valtteri Bottas Stake	+50.243s	phind
12th	Lewis Hamilton Mercedes	+56.122s	oths h
13th	Yuki Tsunoda RB	+61.100s	ar Po
14th	Liam Lawson RB	+62.656s	
15th	Alex Albon Williams	+1 lap	are than 10 car lengths behind the Safet

Retirements

Nico Hülkenberg Haas	39 laps/spin
Sergio Pérez Red Bull	38 laps/spin and damage
Lance Stroll Aston Martin	8 laps/damage
Franco Colapinto Williams	0 laps/accident
Esteban Ocon Alpine	0 laps/accident

Fastest lap

Lando Norris 1m22.384s on lap 56

F1 Sprint - 19 laps

1st Piastri 2nd Norris 3rd Russell 4th Sainz 5th Leclerc 6th Hamilton 7th Hülkenberg 8th Verstappen

TYRE COMPOUNDS USED







AIR TEMP





Hard (C1)

Medium (C2) Soft (C3)

TRACK TEMP

Dry/ night

22°C

DRIVERS' STA	ANDINGS	12 Tsunoda	30pts
1 Verstappen	429pts	13 Stroll	24pts
2 Norris	349pts	14 Ocon	23pts
3 Leclerc	341pts	15 Magnussen	16pts
4 Piastri	291pts	16 Albon	12pts
5 Sainz	272pts	17 Ricciardo	12pts
6 Russell	235pts	18 Bearman	7pts
7 Hamilton	211pts	19 Colapinto	5pts
8 Pérez	151pts	20 Guanyu	4pts
9 Alonso	68pts	21 Lawson	4pts
10 Hülkenberg	37pts	22 Bottas	0pts
11 Gasly	36pts	23 Sargeant	0pts



F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 24

RAGE DEBRIEF THE ABU DHABI GP IN 5 KEY MOMENTS REPORT BY JAMES ROBERTS

Nervous moments for McLaren after Piastri spin

It was a polished, commanding performance from Lando Norris to win the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and secure McLaren's first constructors' title in 26 years. In a year where he openly admits to having made mistakes, Lando didn't put a foot wrong in a dramatic and tense season finale. With the two Ferraris of Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc running second and third behind him, one slip-up would have handed the crown to Maranello. No wonder Zak Brown described the race as "the worst two hours" of his life.

But Norris didn't make any mistakes, to the relief and joy of the entire McLaren team and the legion of papaya fans around the world - including a group watching from the MTC in Woking. After the race Norris praised the team but made it clear that, on a personal level, he wants to go one step further in 2025. His performance in Abu Dhabi was a statement that he can compete at the very highest level.

"The team have done an amazing job this year to come from where we were. I'm so proud of everyone," said Norris. "To end the season like this is perfect, so congrats to everyone in papaya, everyone who supported us this year because it's been a tough one.

"I know better than anyone what I need to improve on and where I'm not strong enough," continued the 25-year old. "And I feel like I've already done that quite in a lot in the last three, four, five races. Next year is hopefully where I can go and fight for the drivers' championship."

It was all left to Norris after a dramatic opening lap which threatened to reverse the fortunes of the two teams battling for the title. After qualifying McLaren seemed perfectly poised to beat Ferrari to the crown, locking out the front row, with Norris on pole ahead of team-mate Oscar Piastri. In contrast, Ferrari's Carlos Sainz lined up third, while Charles Leclerc, hampered by a 10-place grid penalty, started 19th. But by the end of the opening lap, Piastri was 19th, while Leclerc had astonishingly surged to eighth.

"Oscar was super unlucky," Norris said. "He got taken out in Turn 1. So for a minute, my heart was like, 'Oh God, it's not looking as likely.' On the TV screens, I saw Charles was P8 after one lap, so I was a little bit nervous."

Off the start, a forceful Max Verstappen lunged to the inside of Piastri at Turn 1, pitching





the McLaren into a spin. Piastri recovered but picked up a penalty for hitting the back of Franco Colapinto (giving the Williams driver a puncture) which meant he could only salvage tenth by the end of the race.

Leclerc, by contrast, delivered a brilliant recovery drive. He gained three positions before the first corner and made another five by Turn 5. On the run to the chicane on that opening lap, he avoided

chaos as Valtteri Bottas spun Sergio Pérez, seizing the moment to overtake three more on the outside. By the time of the pitstops, Leclerc was up to third.

The two Ferraris hounded Norris and were poised to capitalise on any McLaren misfortune. The tension was palpable as the season drew to a close, but Norris held his nerve, crossing the line in P1 to seal the constructors' title by a slender 14-point margin.





Norris (above) kept calm to clinch the constructors' crown for McLaren, something the team naturally celebrated with gusto

Lewis shines in last dance for Mercedes

Behind the top three, another emotional story unfolded as Lewis Hamilton completed his 246th and final start for Mercedes. The seven-time world champion narrowly missed the podium but executed a stunning last-lap move, passing team-mate George Russell on the outside of Turn 9 for fourth place.

The day before, Toto Wolff voiced his anger to the team after Hamilton was knocked out of Q1 in qualifying, following a misjudgment on timing. His key lap was also compromised when Kevin Magnussen, in a desperate attempt to get off the racing line, accidentally knocked a bollard into the path of the Mercedes, which became wedged under the car.

Starting from a lowly 16th, Hamilton was the only driver to begin on hard tyres, while the rest of the field opted for mediums. His counter-strategy paid dividends in the final stint, where he had the advantage of fresher, faster rubber.

After pitting on lap 35, Hamilton rejoined in seventh and began his charge. He dispatched Nico Hülkenberg's Haas and Pierre Gasly's Alpine and, in a radio exchange with engineer Peter Bonnington, he asked about the gap to his team-mate George Russell. "14 seconds?!" he exclaimed. Toto responded with one final rallying cry: "You can do that."

Hamilton's chase in the closing stages was a throwback to the glory years. A final "Hammer time" message from Bono spurred him on and, with ten laps remaining, the gap to Russell was down to nine seconds.

In the dying moments of the race, Hamilton executed the decisive overtake – and despite not reaching the rostrum, he then delighted the crowd with a series of celebratory donuts on the start/finish straight.

"I love you guys," said Lewis to his team on the slow-down lap. "We love you too and you're always going to a part of our family. And if we can't win – you should," replied Wolff.

After a 12-year stint that delivered six drivers' titles and 84 wins, the Mercedes boss suggested that perhaps an 85th might have been achievable if that rogue bollard hadn't got stuck under the car. Abu Dhabi brought to a close one of the most successful partnerships in the history of the sport and, as he embarks for pastures new, Lewis's final drive was a fitting send-off.





RACE DEBRIEF

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 24

3 Two triple-headers take their toll on tempers

Earlier in the Abu Dhabi GP weekend, Hamilton had organised a dinner with his fellow drivers, but there was an awkward moment for two of them as they avoided each other around the table. Following their tempestuous trip to the stewards in Qatar, Max Verstappen and George Russell continued their war of words at Yas Marina – which led to a reopening of old hostilities between their team bosses. It was cynically suggested that Netflix was in need of some acrimony to help add end-of-season interest to their ubiquitous fly-on-the-wall filming.

"I find it ironic, considering he [Verstappen] said he's going to purposely go out of his way to crash into me and, quote, 'put me on my fucking head in the wall," said Russell. "People have been bullied by Max for years now, and you can't question his

The spat between George Russell and Max Verstappen from Qatar continued at Yas Marina and got quite a bit spicier

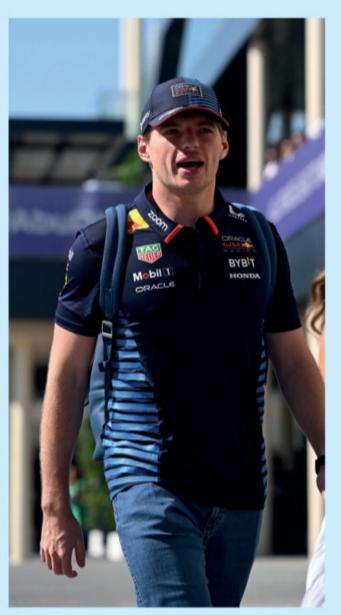


driving abilities. But he cannot deal with adversity whenever anything has gone against him."

Max fired back, continuing his criticism of George by calling him a "backstabber". In the race he took a swipe at, among others, Derek Warwick, one of the stewards in Abu Dhabi. Off the start, Verstappen attempted to pass Oscar Piastri into Turn 1 but was deemed "wholly at fault" in provoking the incident which eventuated. Struck with a 10-second penalty, Max sarcastically suggested: "Could we ask for 20 seconds? Stupid idiots."

Despite the outburst, Verstappen apologised to Piastri after the race, and even joked about his precarious super licence situation. Starting next season with eight points, he quipped that he might time it perfectly to reach 12 points, allowing him to enjoy some paternity leave for the baby he'd just announced he is having with Nelson Piquet's daughter Kelly.

As if to remind Max of the consequences of his behaviour, the FIA then detailed his 'community service' requirement for his Singapore swearing outburst. He will work with junior competitors in a programme organised by the Rwanda Automobile Club, following the FIA Awards ceremony in Kigali before Christmas.





Gasly does the business for Alpine

After the Qatar machinations (see p99) which led to Esteban Ocon's early departure, Jack Doohan made his grand prix debut ahead of his full-time campaign with Alpine next year. It was a low-key affair, albeit trouble-free, but Doohan's 17th-place grid spot meant Pierre Gasly had to do the heavy lifting to keep the Enstone team ahead of Haas in the close battle for sixth in the constructors' championship.

Both Haas cars looked quick although Kevin Magnussen was eliminated in Q2. Nico Hülkenberg qualified a brilliant fourth, only to be struck with a three-place grid penalty for overtaking in the pitlane exit. Gasly, however, had put his Alpine fifth – setting up a tense race day for the two teams.

In the event, Gasly continued his excellent form and finished the race seventh, just 2.9 seconds in front of Hülkenberg to secure Enstone that all-important spot, seven points ahead of Haas. Doohan finished out of the points in 15th, as did Magnussen, who was tipped into a spin by Valtteri Bottas early on and finished 16th, stopping late for soft tyres to record the fastest lap.

RB's charge for points came undone when Liam Lawson's front-left tyre wasn't correctly fitted at his pitstop, while Yuki Tsunoda finished 12th, outside the points.



Old faces say goodbye

The final race in what has been the longest season in Formula 1 history was an emotional exercise for many of the personnel present in Abu Dhabi. As darkness descended over Yas Marina, many were not only celebrating the end of a hard-fought season, but also the conclusion

Kevin Magnussen was just one of a number of drivers for whom Abu Dhabi 2024 will likely be their last Formula 1 race



of another gruelling triple-header.

Drivers departing F1, such as Kevin Magnussen, enjoyed their final weekend with their families in tow. With nearly half the grid either leaving the sport or switching teams, it was a chance to share the moment with their mechanics and engineers. However, for some - including Red Bull's Sergio Pérez and Williams' Franco Colapinto - the future remained unclear as the chequered flag fell for the final time this year.

For others, it was straight into their new outfits. Carlos Sainz, for instance, wasted no time swapping his red car for the blue of Williams. The end-of-season test provided an opportunity for an instant reset.

Some key team members were also on a similar journey, including Sauber's legendary sporting director Beat Zehnder, who is stepping back from racing commitments. Amid the congratulatory messages and heartfelt farewells, there was a surprising moment of honesty from Valtteri Bottas, who simply described his last two years with the Sauber team as a "mistake". Earlier in the race he had crashed into the back of Kevin Magnussen at the chicane, bringing his day to a premature end.

Despite the inevitable changes and some sad farewells, Formula 1 never stops. Within 100 days of the chequered flag in Abu Dhabi, the 75th season of the sport will open to great fanfare in Australia, and the wheels will start turning once more.

RESULTS ROUND 24

YAS MARINA CIRCUIT / 08.12.24 / 58 LAPS



Lst	Lando Norris McLaren	1h26m33.291s	
2nd	Carlos Sainz Ferrari	+5.832s	
Brd	Charles Leclerc Ferrari	+31.928s	
1th	Lewis Hamilton Mercedes	+36.483s	
5th	George Russell Mercedes	+37.538s	
Sth	Max Verstappen Red Bull	+49.847s	
7th	Pierre Gasly Alpine	+72.560s	
8th	Nico Hülkenberg Haas	+75.554s	
9th	Fernando Alonso Aston Ma	rtin +82.373s	10
L0th	Oscar Piastri McLaren	+83.821s	5s penalty for exceeding track limits
L1th	Alex Albon Williams	+1 lap	g track
L2th	Yuki Tsunoda RB	+1 lap	eeding
L3th	Zhou Guanyu Stake	+1 lap	or exc
L4th	Lance Stroll Aston Martin	+1 lap*	alty fo
L5th	Jack Doohan Alpine	+1 lap	s pen
L6th	Kevin Magnussen Haas	+1 lap	Jdes 5
L7th	Liam Lawson RB dn	f/+3 laps/brakes	*includes

Retirements

Valtteri Bottas Stake 30 laps/accident damage Franco Colapinto Williams 26 laps/power unit Sergio Pérez Red Bull 0 laps/damage

Fastest lap

Kevin Magnussen 1m25.637s on lap 57

TYRE COMPOUNDS USED









TRACK TEMP

CLIMATE Dry/day

AIR TEMP

DRIVERS' STANDINGS

DRIVERS STANDINGS				
1 Verstappen	437pts	12 Tsunoda	30pts	
2 Norris	374pts	13 Stroll	24pts	
3 Leclerc	356pts	14 Ocon	23pts	
4 Piastri	292pts	15 Magnussen	16pts	
5 Sainz	290pts	16 Albon	12pts	
6 Russell	245pts	17 Ricciardo	12pts	
7 Hamilton	223pts	18 Bearman	7pts	
8 Pérez	152pts	19 Colapinto	5pts	
9 Alonso	70pts	20 Guanyu	4pts	
10 Gasly	42pts	21 Lawson	4pts	
11 Hülkenberg	g 41pts	22 Bottas	0pts	
motors	port	23 Sargeant	0pts	
STATS		24 Doohan	0pts	



F1 UPGRADES

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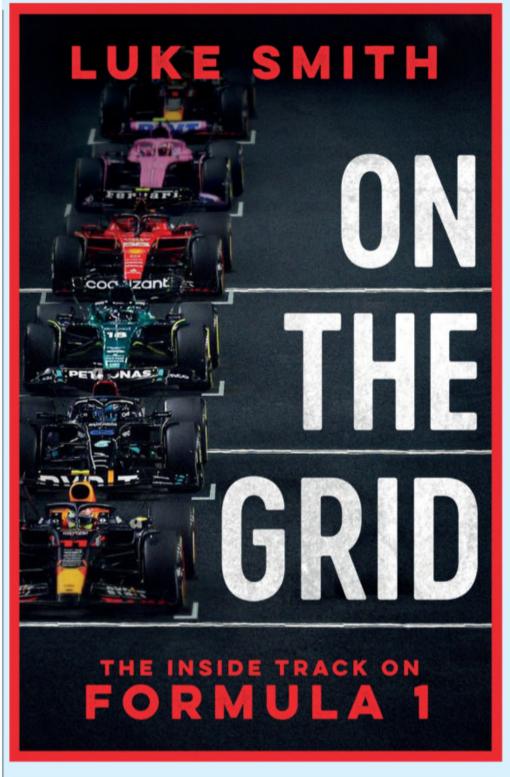
Price £58,750

ulysse-nardin.com

If you thought an Ulysse was a bland 1990s Fiat MPV based on a shared platform co-developed with Peugeot-Citroën, you'd be as correct as you would if you believed it to be the French spelling of the mythical figure Ulysses. More germane to this page, though, it's also half the name of a venerable Swiss watch manufacturer Ulysse Nardin, founded in 1846.

The company's modern range fuses this heritage with more contemporary styling; one of the Freak One collection's signature features is the absence of conventional hands. Instead it uses the tip of the Calibre UN-240 movement's flying carousel to indicate the minutes while a blue rotating disc with an engraved sunray pattern demarcating the hours. This new Navy Blue edition arrives with the 44mm oversized titanium case housing a face in deep indigo to match the strap, providing a further link to the company's maritime history. Should you fall in while trying to work out what time it is, the watch is water-resistant to 30m.





ON THE GRID

Price £22

simonandschuster.co.uk

Long-time *GP Racing* readers will recognise the author of this new book, published in February; Luke Smith was a regular contributor to this organ before leaving the Motorsport Network empire to become senior writer for *The Athletic*. Talk about going on to bigger and better things – he even has two literary agents these days...

This is a cleverly structured book which uses personal experiences as a jumping-off point for explaining the inner workings of Formula 1, with the 2023 season acting as the backdrop.

As we move through the calendar we explore everything from the vastly differing backgrounds of the drivers to the unexpected connections between F1 and the places it visits, including the source of some of the world's finest croissants. For all that the author observes how coffee and a pastry-based comestible provides a most civilised start to the day, this is above all a book about people rather than things. Even if you think you know everything there is to know about Formula 1, you'll learn something within these pages.



TAG HEUER TOURBILLON X SENNA

Price £33,050 tagheuer.com

Appropriately enough Gabriel Leone, star of the new Netflix series about the life and career of Ayrton Senna, is a TAG Heuer ambassador just like the legendary racer himself. To tie into the launch of the Senna bio-series, the watch brand is launching a limited-edition Carrera Chronograph Tourbillon celebrating the life of the master. Blue, yellow and green details predominate, along with a carbon tachymeter reaching up to 400km/h.

The 44 mm titanium case encloses an in-house TH20-09 tourbillon movement which is partially visible front and rear; on the sapphire crystal caseback, Senna's 'S' emblem below a light-grey stencil illustration of his eyes as seen through the visor of a crash helmet – surely one of the most iconic Senna images. Appropriately for a timepiece destined to be a collector's item, it's presented in a custom-designed blue case.









ASTON MARTIN MOTION SIMULATOR

Price From £70,000 flauthentics.com

If you're as mouth-wateringly

wealthy as Lawrence Stroll – or even if you're not, but money is largely no object – then here's a new toy for the portfolio or a gift for the friend who has everything. Officially licenced by the Aston Martin Aramco F1 team and developed in partnership with the Silverstone-based squad, this limitededition motion simulator aims to offer gamers the ultimate in gaming authenticity. It's loaded with haptic actuators to provide rumble feedback

and accurately simulate the twists and turns of a real circuit.

The big draw, of course, is the look and feel of a real Aston Martin F1 car. The launch of the motion simulator commemorates Fernando Alonso's statistically implausible 400th grand prix appearance in Mexico and you can choose to have Fernando's race number on the nose. Adding a wing and motion rigging takes the price to £100,000; sadly there is no discount for choosing the Lance Stroll model.





and Cadillac, Formula One
Management's bizarre opposition
to the former Andretti bid for an
11th team entry has evaporated.
Michael Andretti might be
cheering from the sidelines, but
at least Mario Andretti will be
bringing some legendary clout as
a non-executive director. Their
apparent nemesis, Greg Maffei, is

THE HAMILTONMERCEDES AGE IS OVER AS LEWIS EMBARKS ON A NEW ADVENTURE

also leaving FOM owner Liberty Media, alongside a split-off between that organisation and the Liberty Live ticketing group. FOM insists this doesn't mean the Formula One Group is for sale, but such assets simplification makes it easier if it were suddenly to be under offer...

Tremors could also be stemming from the collective gnashing of unnaturally white teeth in the Automobile Club de Monaco, now its prized GP is moving off its traditional end-of-May slot come 2026. This is to help F1 arrange its calendar in a way that – performatively, at least – tries to reduce the carbon footprint of this wildly nomadic championship. Alongside this comes a new form of rotating races, 10 years after cash-strapped German GP organisers stopped trying it.

The sporting spectacle the calendar facilitates is undergoing perhaps its greatest ever cast change. The Hamilton-Mercedes age

Changes are afoot all over F1.

From 2026 onwards the Monaco
GP will not be the last race in May

A CHANGE WOULD DO YOU GOOD

Empires fall. Even as it celebrates Max Verstappen's fourth successive Formula 1 world championship, Red Bull's previous hegemony is now undoubtedly in decline. The 2024 constructors' is lost at the time of writing — this campaign set to become only the 12th occasion in 66 contests the drivers' champion has not been cloaked in team success too.

The inner frustration around Sergio Pérez's awfulness within Red Bull is swelling yet again. Even those that had previously been emotionally attached to the Mexican are said to be reaching their limits. The gratitude he earned in that stout defence against Lewis Hamilton on Verstappen's behalf in Abu Dhabi in 2021 has ebbed away. But, even if Pérez has been granted another stay of P45 at the Red Bull shareholders' meeting that will follow the 2024 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix – and, say, Verstappen does equal Juan Manuel Fangio with

title number five in 2025 – Max's once rock-solid team will be drastically different anyway.

Adrian Newey is no doubt already doodling in green at home as he waits to hear how many RB17 hypercars have been sold to ultra-wealthy clients desperately chasing F1-like driving sensations. Jonathan Wheatley will already be mentally drilling the Sauber squad in how to avoid next season starting with further pitstop disasters.

Change is happening concurrently elsewhere in F1. Thanks to personal staffing changes made at the head of the bid, wrapped in a new manufacturer rebrand with General Motors is over as Lewis embarks on a new adventure at Maranello. George Russell's commanding victory in Las Vegas came as a handy reminder of his leadership abilities after his previous 2024 win, at Spa, was expunged from the history books. Andrea Kimi Antonelli now slots in alongside Russell and Toto Wolff to form a reworked three-pointed star.

Hamilton heads to Ferrari seeking to begin a new epoch of F1 career

with the glory only Michael Schumacher, really, has enjoyed this millennium. Having already won F1 titles at two different teams, clinching an eighth in Rosso Corsa would go a long way to ending the argument over who is the greatest ever F1 driver. Among sensible debaters, at least.

And so, as these pages close, they prepare to open again next month as a bigger and better package in combination with *GP Racing's* sister title *Autosport*. Against this wider backdrop of tantalising change, it's a fitting time to apply an upgrade.



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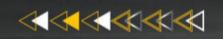












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